

## A “Super” Trick for Garden Success

By Sandra Gray, Fort Bend County Master Gardener

You might think master gardeners spend countless hours making our gardens the envy of all that behold them and, to be honest, some master gardeners do. However, one of the great things about being a master gardener is learning tricks that make us more successful in our gardens with less work. Who wouldn't like that? Let me tell you about one of my favorite tricks.

One of the best things you can do to ensure garden success is to choose the right plant for the right place. Sounds easy but there are so many amazing plants to choose! The solution to this problem is a wonderful Texas A&M AgriLife program called Texas Superstars®. These plants have been tested by university horticulturists and master gardeners and proven to be winners throughout a variety of locations in Texas. What do I mean by “winner”? Hardier, more pest and disease resistant, more flowers, bigger flowers, more fruit, tastier fruit, and a “wow” factor is what I mean. In other words, these plants are more likely to thrive in your garden and dazzle you at the same time. Also, to be designated a Texas Superstar, a plant must be easy to propagate so the plants can be mass-produced for consumers at reasonable prices.



Since the program's inception more than 20 years ago, many types of plants have been recognized as Texas Superstars®, including annuals, perennials, trees, roses, shrubs, vegetables, fruits, vines and more. The criteria for choosing a Texas Superstar® are simple: beauty; special characteristics such as larger blooms, more fruit or attractiveness to fauna; outstanding Texas performance; pest and disease resistance; easily mass-producible for reasonable pricing; and, attractive in the container for ready sales.

An example of a Texas Superstar® is *Duranta*, also known as Golden Dew Drop. This deciduous shrub has masses of blue or purple flowers from spring through fall and golden berries in late fall. It attracts bees, butterflies, hummingbirds and other birds. If you are still not sold, it's drought resistant, too!



*Duranta*

Another example of a Texas Superstar® is the Dwarf Cherry Surprise Tomato, which produces a bounty of cherry tomatoes that are considered four times as sweet as other cherry tomatoes. It's resistant to most common tomato diseases and is highly recommended for home and school gardens.

New Texas Superstars® are added from time to time as they are tested and approved, the newest being an evergreen vine called the Yellow Butterfly Vine. It has delicate yellow flowers but its name comes from the salmon-colored seed pods that resemble butterflies. It is drought-tolerant and thrives in hot sunny locations.

The value of choosing Texas Superstars is more than just their beauty or your increased probability of success. If you choose plants that will thrive in your garden, you save money that might have been wasted on plants that die before their time. You also save time and energy in nurturing plants that will be successful. Just remember to plant and care for them according to directions.

If you are interested in more information about these plants, visit <http://texassuperstar.com/>. This site includes detailed plant descriptions, growing tips and where plants can be purchased. You can also look for plants with Texas Superstar® labels.

For answers to your specific gardening questions, contact the Fort Bend Master Gardener Hotline at <https://fbmg.org/contact/>.

The Texas Nursery and Landscape Association and Texas Department of Agriculture (“Go Texan” Program) partner with Texas A&M faculty, Agrilife Research and Agrilife Extension to spread the word about Texas Superstars®.