



## Lantana

In the high heat of the summer, there really are very few plants with any flowers to speak of. I believe it is important for us to have flowers around us. Since many of us have made the switch from high water using plants to more stark desert landscaping, we need to be creative about getting our flower requirements met. In spring, all the cacti so many other plants put on a terrific display of colors, but what about summer flowers in the desert southwest?



*Lantana, photo taken at Cooperative Extension's Demonstration Gardens*

Among my favorites in summer is **lantana**. This relatively low growing, sprawling, shrubby plant is a terrific addition to gardens. In some parts of the country, it is grown as an annual. It is sensitive to a **hard** frost, but rarely bothered by our winter

temperatures.

This shrub will not only withstand our salty soil, lack of rain, and blistering sunny temperatures, but it thrives in our conditions with only a little help! It **does more than** survive, producing flowers through summer and fall. If you want a butterfly garden, it should give you a lovely display.

The flowers range from bright orange, to yellow rimmed with red. Some even have lavender flowers – very attractive, since so many desert plants produce flowers **only** in yellow.

Of the 150 different species of lantana, plus hybrids and cultivars, only a few are common. Most of ours are descended from *Lantana camara*.

In Florida, Hawaii, Texas, the Galapagos Islands – areas where temperatures are high, soil is fertile, and water is available – common lantana escaped from gardens into other areas, and now is considered an “invasive exotic species” there.

The most common lantanas produce dark berries with seeds, which is the way many of the invaders became established. The berries are somewhat poisonous, although quite a few birds appear to like them. Plant breeders have developed several sterile cultivars, which bloom longer, and don't contribute to the weed problem. They flower in a wider range of colors than the old lantana does – including white and pink.

This drought tolerant plant can survive a lack of rain, but must have some water. Infrequent, deep irrigation helps it grow more luxuriantly.

Here at Cooperative Extension, we recommend infrequent deep irrigation. That encourages thick, deep roots, giving the plant support and a better chance of finding water and nutrients in the soil.



While lantana **grows** in our problematic soils, it benefits from fertilization – try watering it in spring with compost tea, or putting compost around the base early in the season. Limit nitrogen during the summer, since that could interfere with flowering.

This tough plant is not bothered by many insects or diseases. It does not do well in cool shady spots, where it is more likely to develop disease. Save those places for the delicate low light plants that you'd like to try.

Cut it back in late winter, before it starts to produce new leaves. At the end of January, you can cut it down to eight inches or so. It **will** look dramatically shorn, but it **will** grow back and be even lovelier.

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