

## Fanflower Enchants Gardeners

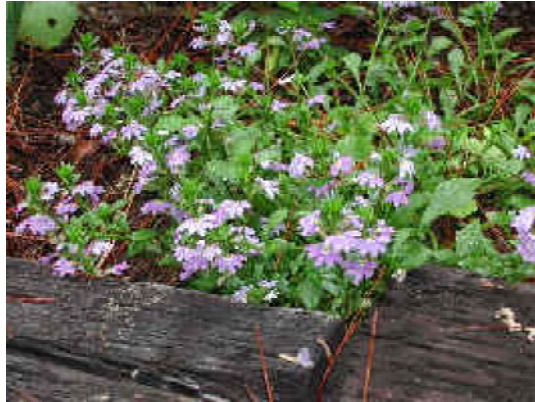


Photo by Marie Harrison: Scaevola.jpg

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**O**ne spring I attended an end-of-the-year faculty party at a friend's house. Part of the fun of visiting with friends is, of course, getting to see their houses. Even more fun, for me, is going outside to see what they have done in their gardens.

The thing that struck me most in this particular landscape was hanging baskets that adorned an upper deck. I still remember the large baskets of blue fanflowers that cascaded from containers. Nothing would do until I found some of these flowers for my landscape. And find them, I did.

I put them in hanging baskets as my friend had done. There they cascaded gracefully over the edge and bloomed continuously! The higher the temperature rose, the more these little stout hearts bloomed!

Fanflower is an Australian import that's becoming ever more popular in gardens across the country. *Scaevola aemula* is the Latin name, but most folks call it simply fanflower. The name comes from Latin *scaevus*, which refers to flowers that have petals on one side and are fan shaped. According to Norman Winter, Mississippi horticulturist, it is named for the Roman hero, Mucius Scaevola, who showed unparalleled bravery (and questionable judgment) by burning off his own left hand. The blossoms do slightly resemble a human hand.

Quite naturally, I am not the only gardener to be smitten by this relative newcomer. It has won honors in Mississippi , Louisiana and Georgia where it has been named Mississippi Medallion, Louisiana Select and Georgia Gold Medal Winner. In trial gardens in Milton , Florida , it bloomed throughout the summer with thousands of blue to purple nickel-sized fans.

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Several cultivars are available. Gardeners can choose from New Wonder, Blue Wonder, Purple Fanfare, and Outback Purple Fan, and others. All are good choices.

This eye-catching annual's popularity stems from its prolific blossoms, low maintenance requirements, and its ability to withstand extreme summer temperatures. It grows best in full sun but also does well in dappled shade.

Small, medium green leaves take a back seat to the showy flowers that radiate in clusters from each node. A solid carpet of flowers is formed as the stems branch, overlap, and tumble over each other. It combines well with other low-growers such as melampodium, threadleaf and Profusion zinnias, verbena, and lantana.

Fanflower can spread three to four feet by fall, so a spacing of at least 18 inches between plants is recommended. Trimming is rarely needed, but recovery is quick if cutting back becomes necessary. For best results, plant in well-drained, organic soil. Keep well watered if grown in containers. In the ground much less water is needed, and the plants are moderately drought tolerant.

Low rates of fertilizer are recommended. Use of slow release fertilizer lessens the need for frequent application.

Try this exciting bedding plant in your garden. Put its versatility to use in a hanging basket, a planter, or in the landscape. You'll be as pleased as my friend and I have been with its performance.

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