

Choose the Right Lantana for Your Landscape



Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: *Lantana* is a very drought-tolerant perennial flower for our landscapes. However, it is important to plant the right kind of *lantana*.

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Most folks know by now that the old butter and eggs *lantana* (*Lantana camara*) that we see in the woods and in landscapes around the South is an exotic invasive plant and should be avoided. The Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council (FEPPC) calls it “a serious, worldwide invader that in some areas has altered habitats and threatens to eliminate populations of native plants and animals.” However, this unfortunate condition does not necessarily mean that residents should not use *lantana* of any kind in their landscapes.

According to Dr. David Sandrock, who was on the program for the University of Florida Horticulture Field Day this summer, several sterile varieties are available. Some are female sterile (produce seeds but very few are viable) and some are male sterile (10% or less of the pollen is viable). Some are both male and female sterile. He recommended the Patriot, Hallelujah, Sunburst, and Cowboy series of *lantana*. FEPPC recognizes the cultivars ‘Gold Mound’, ‘New Gold’, ‘Alba’ and ‘Patriot’ as cultivars that are not known to produce viable seeds.

Another popular species of *lantana* that may be safely used in area landscapes is trailing *lantana* (*Lantana montevidensis*). Weeping, vinelike stems make an attractive groundcover. Foliage may turn red to purple in colder months. Tops will die back at about 20 degrees F, but plants will recover in the spring. Flowering is nonstop from spring through fall or year-round in frost-free areas. Flowers are borne in clusters about 1 1/2 inches wide.

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Cultivars of trailing lantana may be selected, such as ‘Malan’s Gold’ which sports yellow and green foliage and rose-colored flowers. ‘Pot of Gold’ has bright yellow flowers. ‘White Lightnin’ has pure white flowers, and ‘Lavendar Swirl’ has white flowers that gradually deepen to pale lavender and finally rich lavender.

Florida has its own native lantana. One, the Florida lantana (*Lantana depressa*) is one of our endangered species. Another species, sometimes called wild sage (*Lantana involucrata*) is a more commonly occurring native that has white flowers with yellow centers.

Lantana appreciates a place in full sun. Although tolerant of poor soils and drought, better performance can be expected if it is watered weekly. Soil should be well-drained or root rot may be a problem. Lantana exhibits outstanding heat, wind, and salt tolerance, making it a good choice for people who live near bodies of salt water. Nectar-laden blossoms make it a natural choice for butterfly gardens.

Pruning may be done to keep *Lantana* within bounds. It is okay to stub it back to the ground occasionally, especially in spring to remove dead branches. Lantana is not a heavy feeder. Too much fertilizer may suppress flowering and make the plants more susceptible to diseases. One light application in spring is usually sufficient.

Lantana is not the cure-all if insect free plants are wanted. Most varieties are susceptible to the lantana lacebug , and they also may be attacked by whiteflies and spider mites. Systemic insecticides, such as Bayer Advanced Garden Tree & Shrub Insect control , containing imidacloprid, can be used to treat these insect problems.

Lantana is fast growing and easy to propagate. Cuttings may be taken of firm young shoots in spring, or hardwood cuttings can be taken in fall just before frost or cold weather kills it to the ground. New plants are easy to start by layering.

It should be noted that all varieties of lantana are poisonous. Ingestion of a large quantity of green seeds has caused death in children, and pets have reportedly become ill after ingesting lantana. It is poisonous to sheep and cattle. Handling plants may cause skin irritation or allergic reactions.

All this just goes to show that lantana should be considered carefully before it is planted in your landscape. If you choose to grow it, choose either trailing lantana or one of the cultivars of *Lantana camara* that is sterile. Plant it for the bees and butterflies, and for its rugged constitution and summer-long parade of colorful flowers. Used with knowledge of its shortcomings and drawbacks, lantana may be just right for your landscape.

At a Glance

Lantana montevidensis syn. *Lantana sellowiana*

Say: lan-TAN-a mon-tay-vid-EN-sis

Family: Verbenaceae (Verbena Family)

Other names: Weeping lantana, Polecat Geranium

Origin: South America

Zones: 8B-11

Light: Full Sun

Water Use Zone: Moderate

Size: 6-12” tall; spreading to 6’

Soil: Moderate fertility preferred; tolerates poor soil

Salt tolerance: Excellent

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