



Urban Harvest

Warm Temperatures Bring Sweet Smell of Blossoms

By Suzy Fischer

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It took Houston gardens a little longer this year to spring out of winter's chill, but warm temperatures have returned, and with them the sweet smell of summer - summer blossoms that is, not what's on the grill.

Successful gardens should stimulate all the senses. Incorporating fragrant summer bloomers will entice you to linger in the garden despite the prevailing heat. Use aromatic plants in areas you frequently use such as pathways and outdoor living areas. Summer's southeastern winds may impact where you want to plant so the scent carries on the breeze.

Some plants offer fragrance through their aromatic foliage. Use them along pathways where brushing against them ensures the release of their fragrance, but often a stiff breeze will do the trick.

Below is an abbreviated list of summer fragrance possibilities. Some are better known than others. Visit your local nurseries to give them the sniff test.

Trees



Almond verbena (*Aloysia virgata*) is a large shrub or small tree that is almost always covered in spikes of tiny white, almond-scented blooms. They are a magnet for butterflies and hummingbirds.

Citrus (*Citrus* spp.) blooms primarily in the spring, but Mexican lime and Meyer lemon tend to bloom off and on throughout the growing season. The small, white, distinctly fragrant blooms attract butterflies.

A large shrub or small multi-trunked tree, almond Verbena blooms constantly with small white spikes of almond scented flowers

Mexican Clethra (*Clethra pringelii*) certainly is an underused small, evergreen tree and a perfect choice for screening unsightly views. Fragrant flowers are borne on stiff, white spikes.

Southern magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*) is a traditional summer favorite in Southern gardens. The traditional tree needs a lot of room to grow, but small urban gardens can accommodate one of the new dwarf varieties. They also can be espaliered on a sunny southern wall if space is a real challenge.

Shrubs

Antique roses (*Rosa* spp.) are not all fragrant but most are, and they are available in a variety of colors and sizes. Some new rose varieties such as the **David Austin** roses were bred for fragrance.

Butterfly Bush (*Buddleia davidii*) lives up to its name when it comes to attracting butterflies. Its varieties come in a number of colors whose showy, conical blooms give the garden a fresh clean scent.



The fresh clean scent and sweet nectar of butterfly bush's showy conical blooms call out to butterflies in a big way.

Gardenia (*Gardenia jasminoides*) is another staple of the Southern garden, blooming off and on throughout the warm season. White fly sometimes can be problematic with some varieties, but I've found the variety 'Veitchii' to be fairly pest-free. It also grows a little smaller, 3 to 4 feet tall, which makes it easier to find a place in the garden for it.

Vines

Passion vine (*Passiflora incarnata*) has an exotic purple bloom (there are red and white varieties, but I don't think they are as fragrant) with a perfume to match. It is one of the main feeding foods for the Gulf Fritillary butterfly.

Rangoon creeper (*Quisqualis indica*) is an aggressive climber with large, showy red blooms that appear in clusters and offer a fresh scent. Given the right fall conditions, the coarse textured foliage has good fall color.

Passion vine derives its name from the Passion of Christ as many religious symbols can be found in its intensely fragrant exotic flowers. It is an aggressive vine almost always in bloom during the warm season.



Foliage

Copper Canyon daisy (*Tagetes lemmonii*) is the most fragrant foliage plant I have ever come across - yes, more fragrant than eucalyptus. Small, yellow, daisy-like flowers appear as a fall surprise.

Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) not only spices up whatever you may be cooking, but also offers a spicy garden scent. Its gray/green color brings a contrast to the garden's plant palette.

Southern wax myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*) is a large shrub or small tree that produces a berry that attracts a number of songbirds and is distilled to produce the scent bayberry. The foliage is highly aromatic and will release fragrance in a mild breeze.

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