

Copper Canyon daisy, NICE! marigold for fall gardens

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The September Plant of the Month for Operation NICE! (Natives Instead of Common Exotics!) is one of those plants I like to call “Texas-native-compatible.” Copper Canyon daisy (*Tagetes lemmonii*) grows wild in the Sonoran Desert of Arizona and northern Mexico, but it goes very well with native-Texas plants in Hill Country gardens.

As one might expect from its natural habitat, this marigold shrub is drought tolerant, grows in thin soils, and is generally a tough plant. Once Copper Canyon daisy takes hold in the garden, it requires little water and no fertilizer. An additional virtue is the strong aroma of the foliage; deer stay away. Copper Canyon daisy is a perfect NICE! plant.

Copper Canyon daisy grows into a perennial shrub up to about 3 feet high, and it may spread to about 5 or 6 feet wide. The 4-inch-long leaves are compound with thin leaflets, giving the foliage a sort of feathery or airy aspect. Commonly, Copper Canyon daisy blooms in both spring and fall. The main flowering period, however, is in late fall. The inch-wide flowers can be so dense that they hide the foliage, producing an eye-catching mound of solid golden-yellow.

Copper Canyon daisy usually is readily available in local nurseries, although it probably will not be

flowering in early September. Plant it now for later-fall blooms. It grows in full sun or part shade. The Boerne Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas provides free planting and care instructions for Copper Canyon daisy at nurseries participating in Operation NICE! (Hill Country African Violets and Nursery, Barkley’s Nursery Center, and Maldonado Landscape and Nursery).

“Copper Canyon daisy” apparently is a relatively recent nursery-trade name given to this plant to imply it comes from Copper Canyon in northern Mexico. *Tagetes lemmonii* also is known as Mt. Lemmon marigold, mountain marigold, and Mexican bush marigold. As the “ii” on the end of the species name tells, this plant was named after someone with the sir name of Lemmon. It is named for John Gill Lemmon and his wife Sara, who collected the plant in southeastern Arizona in the early 1880s. Descendants of plants the Lemmons took to California were introduced into the nursery trade.

J.G. Lemmon began botanizing while recuperating in California after his release from a Confederate prisoner-of-war camp in Georgia. He discovered many new plants on the West Coast and later in southern Arizona. After he married at the age of 48, all the Lemmon plant collections were labeled “J.G.

Lemmon and wife.” It is said that Mt. Lemmon near Tucson is named after Sara Plummer Lemmon, the first white woman to set foot on that mountain. Both the Lemmon and Plummer sir names are used in the scientific names of many Arizona plants discovered by this husband-and-wife team.

What’s Blooming in Our Backyard After So Much Rain

All this cool, dark, and wet weather seems to be causing leaves to turn brown on certain bushes and trees, as well as disrupting and inhibiting some normal bloom periods.

White: snow-on-mountain (early this year), blackfoot daisy, Texas milkweed, pigeon berry, evergreen sumac, kidney wood, Anacacho orchid tree (second bloom).

Red or orange: big red sage, flame acanthus, *Salvia darcyi*, *Salvia greggii*, lantana, red morning glory, mountain sage (early).

Pink: purple coneflower, rose pavonia, palafoxia.

Yellow: zexmenia, Lindheimer senna, green eyes, esperanza, water primrose, straggler daisy.

Purple: eryngo, blue mist-flower, Mexican oregano.

Blue: Lindheimer morning glory, mealy sage, indigo spires, giant blue sage, shrubby blue sage.