

# Drought reveals Texas-tough plants in landscape

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO BY Dr. William M. Johnson



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Rainlilies are aptly named because they often produce a flush of flowers within a few days after a rainfall that breaks a dry spell.

Weather conditions during the last several months have been tough on plants.

It has been amazing how many records have been set from daytime temperatures, nighttime temperatures, days without rain, windy days, acres burned by wild fires and so on.

One silver lining to such onerous weather conditions has been some notable “Energizer Bunny” landscape plants that can take a Texas-tough licking and keep on ticking.

The following are a few examples of landscape plants that have earned my 2011 Energizer Bunny Performance Award for withstanding harsh growing conditions and delivering color to the landscape under duress.

## Rainlilies

I know from personal experience that rainlilies are tough plants. We have a patch of rainlilies growing in our demonstration garden adjacent to my current office.

I use the term current office, as we are in the process of relocating our office to a new facility in Carbide Park (4102 Main St., FM 519) in La Marque.

We also are relocating many of the landscape plants in the old demonstration garden to the new demonstration garden also located in Carbide Park.

Rainlilies are aptly named because they often produce a flush of flowers within a few days after a rainfall that breaks a dry spell.

As I took a quick stroll through the old demonstration garden last Sunday morning, I was surprised to see a large patch of colorful flowers that seemed to appear overnight after last week’s rainy weather.

In just four days after the first rain fell last week, that bed of rainlilies had transformed from a patch of dried brown leaves to a carpet of grass-like blue-green leaves beneath a mass of pink flowers.

Generations of sharing gardeners have spread rainlilies. In fact, rainlilies can be found in local landscapes even if the home that once stood there has been long gone or vacated.

Such a circumstance is the best testament for rainlilies’

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reputation for being really tough plants.

The blooms last for two to three days, but new flowers continue to develop for several days, creating flushes of flowering. The flowers close up at night.

Rainlily bulbs produce clumps of attractive, grass-like blue-green leaves that range from a few inches to more than a foot in length.

Rainlilies are members of the amaryllis family, which includes other popular bulb plants including amaryllis, paper whites and snowdrops.

The botanical, or scientific, name for rainlily, *Zephyranthes*, is derived from a Greek mythological figure. Zephyrus was the Greek god of the west wind that typically brought the rainfall with which these plants are associated.

Rainlilies can be planted in pockets throughout the garden or mass plantings can be done to create large, majestic sweeps of blooms. They perform best under sun or part shade.

#### Peppermint Flare Hibiscus

Peppermint Flare Hibiscus (*Hibiscus moscheutos* 'Flare' series) also stood out in the demonstration garden as it managed to produce an abundance of large, colorful blooms throughout this year's drought.

Peppermint Flare Hibiscus is a root hardy perennial with large 8- to 10-inch flowers with a compact growth habit of 4-foot-by-4-foot.

The parent plant was developed in the mid 1990s by Sam Mcfadden, of Somerville, Tenn. He felt the flower was rather gaudy because of its bright fuchsia color and the hibiscus was not commercially promoted.

McFadden was actually embarrassed by such a bright gaudy flower. Since 1998, two new offspring have been developed from the original parent.

They bear pink and peppermint colors. Peppermint Flare Hibiscus produces practically sterile flowers that do not produce seed and encourages luxuriant re-blooming.

Our Peppermint Flare Hibiscus also was located at the old demonstration garden, and was not watered throughout the dry weather.

On June, 9 the plant was removed from the old garden and relocated to the Car-bide Park garden. It already has produced a flush of new leaves and is set to produce many more beautiful flowers.

Rainlilies and Peppermint Flare Hibiscus should be given space in local gardens. Even the neglectful gardener should be able to grow these two Texas-tough landscape plants.

