

## Lantana

### Lantana Camera



#### **Lantana: A Beautiful But Poisonous Plant**

Lantana, also known as shrub verbena, is native to the West Indies but naturalized in Florida where 3 native species of Lantana occur. It is grown in Florida for its beautiful flower colors and great adaptability to different environmental conditions. It is widely planted in butterfly gardens and recommended for dry areas in the landscape.

**The plant:** Lantana is a deciduous shrub up to 6 ft or more in height, with multiple square stems, covered with bristly hairs when green, often armed as well with scattered small prickles. Leaves are opposite, simple, blades oval covered with rough hairs, to 6 in long and 2.4 in wide, with blunt-toothed margins and blade bases broad, squared off. Leaves have a pungent odor when crushed. Flowers are small, multicolored, borne in stalked, dense, flat-topped cluster about 1.5 in across with the corolla forming a narrow tube with 4 short spreading lobes. Flowers may be white to pink or lavender, yellow to orange or red, changing colors over time. Fruit is a round, fleshy, 2-seeded drupe, about 0.2 in wide, green turning purple then blue-black when mature.

**Culture:** Grows in many types of well drained soils and is drought tolerant once established. Flowers best in full sun. Cuttings for propagation can be taken at any time, except in winter when the plant is dormant. Varieties: The varieties ‘Gold Mound’, ‘New Gold’, ‘Alba’, and ‘Patriot’ are not known to produce viable seed in nursery or landscape plantings. Other varieties available are “Confetti”, “Flame”, “Raspberry”, “Salmon”, and “Tangerine”. Most yellow-flowered lantanas found in nurseries are hybrids of native and exotic species. Weeping lantana is a lavender-flowered species from South America that can be used as a ground cover or placed in pots throughout the garden.

**Ecological Significance:** It is considered a serious weed in many countries and in some areas has altered habitats and threatens to eliminate populations of native plants and animals. In Florida, it often forms thickets in sunny open areas, commonly invading disturbed sites such as roadsides, spoil islands, pastures, citrus groves, and cultivated woodlands. Also frequent in well-drained undisturbed habitats such as native pinelands, hammocks, and beach dunes. Widely promoted for ornamental cultivation since the early 1800s, it has extensively hybridized with native Lantanas, contaminating the local gene pool. Strongly resists foraging, contributing to its pest-plant status outside its natural range. It can tolerate fire by regenerating from basal shoots. It produces flowers year-round in warm weather. Seeds are dispersed by birds.

**Toxicity:** This plant is considered to be one of the chief causes of poisoning in Florida. The green, unripe fruits are the most dangerous. The ripe fruits are apparently not harmful, but the leaves are known to be fatally poisonous to animals, even in relatively small quantities.

**Pests and Diseases:** Caterpillars can destroy foliage and reduce flowering. Control with any recommended insecticides.

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