

ON GARDENING

Serena angelonias continue to sizzle in the summer landscape

By **NORMAN WINTER**
 McClatchy-Tribune
 News Service

If you are looking for that special spiky texture of blooms to create interest and excitement in the garden, look no further than the Serena angelonia. The angelonia or summer snapdragon seems to be on an unstoppable course in rising popularity. Every year there are new varieties, new colors, and habits from their heights and widths to those that trail. Not only are we experiencing the influx of new varieties but commercial landscapers and savvy gardeners everywhere are creating new and dazzling combinations from the flower border to the mixed container.

Award winner

Pan American Seed's Serena series has not only been sweeping awards but now they are showing innovation with mixes. I would have imagined that five years ago I would not have been on board with a mix for angelonias but now this single color kind of guy is changing his tune. I am even seeing landscapers not only using these mixes,

but creating their own by using four or five of one color — like blue next to a clump of white, pink, purple and lavender repeating the design throughout the planting. From a distance it looks random but not quite the informality of a true seed mix. It also creates a sense of motion that is almost wave-like.

The Serena series was the first seed-produced angelonia to hit the market and generally tops out at around 20 inches. New in the market will be the Serenita which as you might guess will be shorter by about 5 inches placing them in the 12- to 15-inch range.

Sadly, when I have speaking engagements and survey the audiences, the vast majority still hasn't tried this incredible plant. This should bode well for the suppliers coming out with these new varieties because the market potential is huge. Right now it seems that gardeners who are true plant lovers and commercial landscapers are driving the train. Get on board!

A tough plant

If you find yourself in the group that hasn't given them a try, let me assure you these are tough plants, and though

they may have the name summer snapdragon they are from Mexico and the West Indies and can take our torrid summers. Since they are so heat-and drought-tolerant, you will want to plant them in mass with other rock solid performers like melampodium, Profusion zinnias, Titan periwinkles or rudbeckias. One of the most beautiful plantings I have recently seen combined the delightful blue angelonia blossoms with hot pink petunias. This spiky texture is most welcome in the garden world dominated by round flowers.

Growing is easy, select a site in full sun for best blooming. Please do not stick this wonderful plant in tight, concrete-like soil. Before you plant, incorporate two to three inches of organ-

GARDEN TO 6D

ic matter in to your bed. While preparing the bed take the opportunity to mix 2 pounds of a slow release fertilizer with a 2-1-2 ratio. After planting complete your project by adding a good layer of mulch like pine straw or shredded pine bark.

Serena angelonias are terrific low-maintenance, worry-free plants. They will work superbly in a "grandma's cottage garden" type landscape and yet have the ability to look at home next to bananas or elephant ears in a tropical style garden. The real issue is to make sure this is the year you give them a try.

Norman Winter, *executive*

director of The National Butterfly Center in Mission, Texas, is author of "Tough-as-Nails Flowers for the South" and "Captivating Combinations: Color and Style in the Garden." Contact him at winter@naba.org.





These Serena Blue angelonias offer a welcome spiky texture in this combination with hot pink petunias.
McCLATCHY TRIBUNE