

Tidal Wave Silver petunias are tough enough for Texas summers

Tidal Wave Silver petunia

Petunias continue to be the most popular bedding plant in the world. Travel across the country, and you will find these cheery flowers hanging out of suspended baskets, draping from window boxes and adorning the edges of flower beds all season long. But petunias rarely star in Texas landscapes because they do not like our sweltering summer climate. They just shrivel up and die as soon as nighttime temperatures stay consistently warm.

For years Texas plantsmen searched for petunias that would hold up in our heat and humidity. A few weeks ago I introduced readers to Laura Bush petunias, a reseeding annual with vivid magenta flowers. Another Texas Superstar petunia produces large flowers in pastel shades for a cooler color palette.

Name: Tidal Wave Silver petunia.

Why you want it: This lovely trailing petunia combines with many other flower colors, blooms all summer and drapes gracefully over the edge of a pot or basket for a colorful vertical effect.

Foliage: Ovate, pale green leaves covered in tiny hairs are 1 inch wide and 2 to 3 inches long. Stems are fleshy and grow 2 feet or more in length during the season. To promote branching on the stems, trim the plant once or twice during the growing season, and they will get bushier and produce more flowers.

Flowers: Silvery blush flowers with a purple center and purple veining grow to 2 inches wide. Flowers are held upright on stiff stems with multiple flowers on every branch. Blooming starts in early spring and continues into early winter, providing months of color.

Size: These versatile plants create several different forms depending on how they are initially planted. Plant them close together -- 12 inches apart -- and they will grow upward, reaching 18 to 24 inches tall, creating a dense hedge. Put more space between the plants -- 18 to 24 inches -- and they will spread to make a ground cover 8 to 10 inches tall. Place one at the edge of a large pot, and it will become a waterfall of flowers 12 inches wide and 2 to 3 feet long.

Hardiness: Tidal Wave petunias handle cold exceptionally well and often last through our winters here in North Texas. Blooming stops, but the plants remain green. Cover them in extremely cold weather, and they can last up to three years.

Care: Plant Tidal Wave petunias in well drained soil in a sunny location. As with all petunias, water on the flowers causes them to wilt and fade, so avoid overhead watering as much as possible. If plants become leggy or too tall during the season, trim them back halfway with hedge shears or a string trimmer. Monthly applications of granular fertilizer or weekly applications of water-soluble fertilizer along with regular watering keeps plants strong and constantly blooming.

Landscape uses: Combine Tidal Wave Silver petunia with dark blue or purple flowers for a cool look, or use them as an underplanting to set off bright red or pink roses. They make stunning container plants with their long bloom time and graceful form but do need a large pot.

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