

# A hardy and popular ornamental shrub

Lantana was brought to India by the British during early 19th century as an ornamental plant for the Calcutta Botanical Garden and with its extremely adaptable and prolific nature, it has spread to all areas of the country except the deserts and the Himalayas, writes **N. CHANDRAMOHAN REDDY**



All plant species do not grow skyward. Some grow downwards, and some attain growth horizontally. *Lantana* is one such genus, trailing down the hanging pot or covering the ground, its thick foliage adorned by little globes of colourful blooms.

## GREEN MATTERS

colourful clusters of blossoms even under the most intense sunlight. Flowers are five-lobed, small, salver-formed, and grouped tightly into rounded terminal heads.

Flowering is almost year round in warm areas. There are many types distinguished by the colour of flowers, in garden varieties of *Lantana camara* - pink, white, red, yellow and orange. In *Lantana montevidensis* or Creeping Lantana, lilacs and whites are available. Creeping Lantana is a continuous bloomer producing heavy quantities of small lilac flowers (White flower variety is not a heavy bloomer). The flowers of creeping Lantana are heavily fragrant.

Originally Lantana was brought to India by the British during early 19th century as an ornamental plant for the Calcutta Botanical Garden and with its extremely adaptable and prolific nature, it has spread to all areas of the country except the deserts and the Himalayas. Lantana is considered as an invasive and noxious weed and has become menace in some natural forest areas. Then how can we use this 'obnoxious' species in our garden? It is thanks to the horticulturists who developed sterile, non-fruit-bearing cultivars of *Lantana* which are not invasive. Otherwise the birds and mammals spread the plants to unwarranted locations by eating the fruits and passing the seeds. There are two important ornamental species which have horticultural importance, namely *Lantana camara* (Common Lantana) and *Lantana montevidensis* (Creeping Lantana).

### Gardening

Lantana is fast growing and easy to propagate, establish and maintain and it is prized by gardeners for its copious blooms. The garden varieties are generally more compact with smaller leaves. The flowers are highly attractive to butterflies. These plants can survive prolonged dry periods. Lantanas grow well under full sunlight in well drained soils. They tolerate moderate saline conditions and can be used in seaside plantings. But optimum growth with profuse flowering happens when planted in slightly acidic soils. However, they cannot tolerate total shade, heavy clay soils, high salinity and water-logged conditions.

Creeping Lantana is perfect to use for colourful low-maintenance groundcover. The lilacs bloom continually. This is an excellent plant for containers and planters where the branches cascade down gracefully. It is also used as a low hedging, edging and ground cover which thrives in both sun and semi-shade, but blooms more profusely in sunny locations.

### Characteristics

Ornamental Lantana is a perennial, compact, scrambling evergreen shrub often forming dense thickets, growing to about two to three feet height, characterised by square-shaped stems. Leaves are egg shaped (ovate) and bright green with a rough hairy texture and toothed edges. They produce bright and



- The name 'Lantana' is derived from the Latin name for the *Viburnum* plants which have similar leaves and inflorescence. The species name 'camara' is probably adopted from the West Indian colloquial name for the common species. The name of other species, 'montevidensis' refers to Montevideo, Uruguay from where the species originated.

- Care must be taken when planting 'Lantana' species due to its invasive nature. It is recommended to buy the sterile varieties developed in horticulture trade to avoid the threat Lantana poses to other species. These sterile Lantana plants do not produce berries and, thus, cannot reproduce on their own.



Lantanas are ideally suited for hanging baskets and any other containers.

Newly planted Lantana plants require good watering and once established, these plants require very little maintenance. During hot summer or drought, one must water once a week to ensure uninterrupted blooms.

A balanced, slow-release fertilizer can be applied during the spring. Lantanas are very hardy plants and over fertilization may result in more foliage growth at the expense of flowers.

Prune the branches often, as the blooms increase with new growth. Overgrown branches can be cut back to a third of their growth so that new flush with tender branches and fresh flowers appear. Lantanas are not affected by too many problems, if planted under bright sun-

light in well-drained soil.

Powdery mildew, sooty mold, rust, and whiteflies are common if the plants are not given enough light. Root-rot may cause death of the plants, if they are kept too wet.

### Propagation

Lantanas can be easily propagated from stem cuttings during summer. Take semi-ripe cuttings, about four to five inches long from the non-flowering branches, cut off the leaves and side branches. Submerge the ends in a root hormone, and insert the cuttings in a porous medium. Roots will start to form in about two to three weeks. Once new shoots are seen, they are ready for transplanting.

(The author is a forest officer and can be contacted at 'nchandramohanreddy@gmail.com')



**ATTRACTIVE:** Lantanas can be easily propagated from stem cuttings. -PHOTOS: N. CHANDRAMOHAN REDDY

## New dimension to internal aesthetics

False ceilings using gypsum are a good-looking and long-lasting solution

False ceilings have long been left on the backburner, leaving the market open to substandard material. Economy has always ruled when choosing material for false ceilings but the race to provide the cheapest possible solutions is also the reason for the flood of sub-standard material in the market.

Gypsum, known for its inherent properties of water resistance, fire resistance and insulation, has become an essential component in a lot of building material. According to a press release, VANS Gypsum's new range of false ceilings incorporates gypsum. The product is reportedly not only hygienic enough for a hospital but also aesthetically appealing for a cosy corporate office. The biggest problem with false ceilings is sagging and staining. Most false ceiling material tends to absorb and retain moisture, which causes it to stain, expand, sag and crack. The retained moisture provides a base for the growth of fungus, causing respiratory infections. VANS



**MAJOR PROBLEM:** The biggest problem with false ceilings is sagging and staining.

Gypsum RH 96 ceilings and drywalls do not retain any absorbed moisture, thus rooting out these problems. Besides, gypsum is a natural fire-retardant. When exposed to direct

flame, water vapour is released as a result of the dehydration of gypsum, which prevents the fire from spreading. The ceiling presents almost uninterrupted spaces

and can dramatically change the look of interiors. VANS Gypsum has a range of over 25 ceiling tiles. The product is 100% recyclable, and does not lead to burning eyes or itching

skin. In use for close to 40 years in over 30 different countries under parent company GSP Manufacturing, UK, they are now available in India.

## Energy efficient water heaters launched

The US-based manufacturer of water heaters, A. O. Smith comes up with a new range

Promising to address the needs of both household and commercial needs, A.O. Smith, a US-based manufacturer of water heaters, has come up with a new range.

Three litre instant category water heater used in kitchen, 15 litre and 25 litre product, Air2Heat pump and high-end horizontal product were the new varieties introduced in the market, Tamal Chaudhuri, Managing Director of the A.O. Smith India Water Heating Private Limited announced here.

"We developed an advanced technology in residential water heaters - Air2Heat. It's highly energy efficient and environmental friendly consuming only 40 per cent of the electricity when compared to other traditional products," he explained. He said the new prod-

### Product range

In order to cater the demand of consumers for stylish products, the company has also launched EWS product range (3 litre) water heater with a unique glass coated heating element. Aesthetically designed for Indian homes, this variety goes well with the kitchen or bathroom, he said.

The patented blue diamond glass lining formula out-performs other glass-lined tanks and therefore offers enhanced protection against premature tank failure caused by hard water commonly found here, Mr. Chaudhuri said.

As part of its new line of products, the company has launched Better (HSE-SBS) and Good (HSE-SAS) which uses a special cathodic action to fight the corrosive elements and thus prolongs the life of the water heater. On the other hand, the HSE-HNS 2kW water heater comes with a 2kW element which minimises and prevents scale formation on the surface of the element.

Headquartered in Bengaluru, A.O. Smith India manufactures and markets residential and commercial water heaters and currently has sales offices and stocking warehouses throughout the country as well as sales and customer service organisation in place. The company looks at increasing its market share by 18 per cent in the next two years.

M. SRINIVAS