That cold winters freeze hit our warm weather plants hard. One of those plants was the lantana (verbenaceae). These plants not only turned brown/black but they looked as though they were seriously dead. We had recommended to you that the plants damaged by the cold snap needed to be left alone and that we needed to play the “wait and see game”. Well, most of the lantana plants are now coming around.

Lantana is very popular here in Lake Havasu since it thoroughly enjoys our warm climate and soil. It is a hardy, low-maintenance plant and its only need is a good pruning in the spring.

Lantana is a member of the verbena family. It grows wild in the Deep South and is considered a weed in Hawaii. The plant originated in the tropical areas of North, South and Central America and in South Africa. Because of its origin, it will provide us with color off and on all year long. It dislikes cold, and is considered an annual in cold winter climates. Here in Havasu, lantana will become spindly in the wintertime but will bounce back as soon as the heat turns on; in fact it revels in it. It is tolerant of poor soil conditions (good thing) and its water needs are moderate. Too much water or fertilizer will cut down on the blooms (gee, another good thing).
The leaves are dark green and are 3 inches or more in length with rounded tips with toothed edges and deeply veined fuzzy surfaces. The foliage has a pungent smell when touched. The flowers are quite small with dozens of blooms making up a cluster. The color palette is great. White, pink, red, yellow, purple, orange, magenta are only the beginning. There is a lantana called Confetti, which has yellow, pink and purple blossoms in a single cluster – it is really quite outstanding.

If you enjoy watching wildlife then this plant will be a plus in your yard. Several times a year, tiny black berries will appear resembling blackberries. These berries are poisonous to us but not to birds which will nibble on these berries. Along with that the nectar of the flowers brings in hummingbirds and butterflies including the monarchs, swallowtails and pink ladies.

There are over 150 species of lantana but there are two main species. *Camara*, which is a shrub, and can grow upright to 6 feet. It can be trimmed into low hedges or foundation shrubs. *Montevidensis*, which grows like a ground cover, can have branches that trail from three to six feet. This is excellent for covering banks and erosion control. So depending on your landscape design, there is a lantana that will accommodate your needs.

Lantana use can be in borders, hanging pots, and containers and is a great color accent amongst cacti. The only draw back that lantana has is that it can become invasive if planted too close to a walkway since it likes to spread out.

This is one plant that will not fail in bringing out color in the heat of summer here in the desert. The dark green foliage along with its bright colored flowers will at least make your yard feel a little cooler then it really is.

Don’t forget to join us on the first Tuesday of every month for Home Garden Day at the Library from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.
**Dottie Holman is a Lake Havasu City Master Gardener. For information, contact the Master Gardener Hot Line at 505-4105.**

**CONTACT:** VICKI COOMBS  
ADMINISTRATIVE ASST  
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA  
MOHAVE COUNTY  
COORDINATING EXTENSION  
101 E BEALE ST STE A  
KINGMAN AZ 86401-5808  
928 753-3788/928 753-1665 (FAX)  
mohavece@cals.arizona.edu

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