

Lady Bird Johnson bluebonnet 'bluer than blue'

New Texas Superstar plant cobalt blue



Texas A&M AgriLife horticulturists have described the deep blue color of Lady Bird Johnson Royal Blue bluebonnets as "awesome." (Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service photo)

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COLLEGE STATION – With such deep blue flowers that it was almost named 'Cobalt,' the newest Texas Superstar, Lady Bird Johnson Royal Blue bluebonnet, has some other extraordinary features as well, say Texas A&M AgriLife horticulturists.

"Lady Bird Johnson Royal Blue bluebonnet is an outstanding plant," said Dr. Larry Stein, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service horticulturist, Uvalde. "It produces awesome color. The number of blooms it sets is typically more than a traditional blue bluebonnet."

Texas Superstar plants undergo extensive tests throughout the state by Texas A&M AgriLife Research and AgriLife Extension horticulturists, said Dr. Brent Pemberton, AgriLife Research horticulturist and chair of the Texas Superstar executive board.

To be designated a Texas Superstar, a plant must not just be



beautiful but also perform well for consumers and growers throughout Texas, Pemberton said. Superstars must also be easy to propagate — which ensures the plants are not only widely available throughout Texas, but also reasonably priced.

Lady Bird Johnson bluebonnet fulfills the Texas Superstar mandate very well, Stein said. All bluebonnets trace their ancestry to a hardy winter annual native to Texas, and are commonly seen along roadsides and in uncultivated pastures throughout the state. The Lady Bird Johnson bluebonnet has the added advantage of producing as much as 40 percent more seed than traditional bluebonnets, which means it should be very easy to propagate.



A honeybee pollinates Lady Bird Johnson Royal Blue bluebonnet. (Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service photo)

The development of Lady Bird Johnson bluebonnet began with a serendipitous discovery, according to Stein, who participated in its selection.

Dr. Jerry Parsons, former AgriLife Extension horticulturist, San Antonio, and Stein have been selecting bluebonnet lines for years. It was Parsons who selected a line with a “true Aggie maroon color” in 1995, a plant that was subsequently named the Texas Maroon bluebonnet, Stein said.

Though officially retired, Parsons continues to work with him and others to develop new lines, Stein said.

“We discovered Lady Bird Johnson in a field of red bluebonnets,” he said. “We were trying to isolate reds out from maroon bluebonnets, and we were getting these really dark blues coming up in the red fields. So we saved the seed of the really dark blues and isolated those until the line would come back 99-plus percent true.”

Lady Bird Johnson has all the other hardy growth characteristics of the native Texas



bluebonnet and can be grown from seeds or transplants, Pemberton said.

Both seeds and transplants should be available this fall from nurseries and home improvement stores participating in Texas Superstar promotions. A listing of retailers who participate can be found at <http://texassuperstar.->

Standard bluebonnet, left, compared to Abbott Pink bluebonnet, center, and the new Lady Bird Johnson Royal Blue bluebonnet in top right corner. (Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service photo)

[com/retailers/](http://texasagrilife.com/retailers/) .

Stein said the growing recommendation for bluebonnet seeds is to sow in August through September in full sun. Sets can be planted much later, but they also need full sunlight, and will not perform well in an area that receives less than eight to 10 hours of full sun daily.

Bluebonnets need well-drained soil. In sticky soils with more clay, the recommendation is either to grow them in raised beds or amend the top layer of the soil with 3 to 4 inches of organic matter.

As they are Texas natives, once established, bluebonnets are typically tough and drought tolerant, he said.

Stein emphasized they do not tolerate soils that aren't well drained. Seeds may germinate, but plants will never fully develop, becoming either stunted or turning yellow and dying.

Peak bloom depends upon the weather, but usually comes in late March to early April, Stein said.

More information on bluebonnets, including how to grow them in a Bermuda grass or Zoysia lawn, can be found at <http://bit.ly/182Xn4a> .

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