



Stephen & Kristin Pategas

in the garden by Stephen and Kristin Pategas

More Cool Plants

When an unusual plant is well-placed in a design it really attracts attention. We find these plants at trade shows, wholesale nurseries, plant shows, and sometimes garden centers. We use all of these in our garden and/or have seen them successfully grown in gardens we designed in Central Florida (Zone 9b).

- *Agave geminiflora*/Twin flowered agave – This low-water use agave forms a ball of not-too-sharp spines that grows to about 2 to 3-feet in diameter. Over time it develops a short trunk and has a strong textured foliage look.

- *Aloe arborescens*/Torch aloe – Flowers are cylindrical in shape and are a vibrant red/orange color. It shares similar medicinal properties with the well-known *Aloe vera* and has been used to treat burns or wounds. This succulent can mound to over 6-foot in height but ours are easily kept at 3 to 4 feet.

- *Bauhinia galpinii* (formerly *B. punctata*)/Red orchid shrub – This large shrub reaches 8 to 10-feet in height and spread, but can be kept smaller. This shrub can also be trained up onto a trellis or pergola. It provides an intense red bloom from autumn to winter that contrasts well with the green leaves.

- *Callaeum* (formerly *Mascagnia*)

- *macropterum*/Yellow butterfly vine – This evergreen vine clothes two arches in our garden and never fails to knock the socks off of visitors of all ages. It provides year-round visual interest and starting in May sprouts sprays of delicate yellow blossoms that form leathery, chartreuse colored seed pods. As the seed pods age they become papery while turning a rusty brown and persist through most of the year. Payoff number one: this vine blooms into October and all three of these colorful phases (yellow/chartreuse/rusty) occur at once for about six months. Payoff number two: the seeds sprout to form seedlings that easily transplant into pots. Payoff number three: the seedpods resemble

butterflies that always bring a smile when placed onto open palms. Oh, those seedlings you potted up? Everyone will want one.

- *Nassella* (formerly *Stipa*) *tenuissima*/Mexican feather grass – You'll find an incredibly fine texture to the blades and blooms of this low growing (12 to 24-inch height) and low-water use ornamental grass. We find volunteers popping up nearby and then pot them up. That saves us trips to the garden center. Use rubber gloves to lightly groom this grass and gently pull out the old foliage.

If you think you have an unusual plant, send us a picture. We may add it to our next installment of cool plants.



Pictured top left: Butterfly vine in its glory; middle: Red orchid shrub; far right: Torch aloe at Casa Feliz; bottom right: Twin flowered agave; bottom left: Mexican feather grass in bloom. Photos by Stephen G. Pategas, Hortus, Oasis.