Crazy Cupheas

Looking for a plant that will bloom non-stop all summer long? Then you might want to take a look at the Cupheas. Cuphea (coo-fee’ah) is a large genus of plants belonging to the Loosestrife family, which makes them related to the Crape Myrtles.

Cupheas originated from the central regions of the Americas, predominantly Mexico and Guatemala. They are grown in many countries as a seed oil crop. And while there are approximately 260 species in this group, only a few are being used as ornamental plants. This group does, however, contain one of the most commonly used landscape plants—the False Mexican Heather.

In general, Cupheas are low-growing, shrubby plants. They are especially good for borders and edging. They grow best in full sun and produce their most spectacular blooms in bright light. Cupheas seem to perform best in the hottest part of the summer. Once established, they will tolerate drier situations but will look better with regular watering. They prefer well-drained, fertile soil. In infertile soils, flowering will be enhanced with regular applications of a good slow release fertilizer.

Cupheas are tender tropical shrubs and freezing temperatures will kill them. In Northwest Florida (Zone 8) they will usually return after a freeze but seem to flower a little later in summer. Some Cupheas will self-sow and return from seed. Occasionally, these plants will pop up in unexpected areas.

Cupheas are known for their flowers. Many have tubular flowers that make them excellent hummingbird and butterfly plants. The flowers can be odd-shaped which gives many of the plants their common names such as Cigar Flower, the Cigarette Plant and Bat-faced Cuphea. Following are some of the Cupheas most commonly used as ornamentals.

*Cuphea hyssopifolia*—This plant, also known as False Mexican Heather, is known for its abundant white, pink or lavender flowers. It has dense, green foliage and reaches a maximum height of about two feet. False Mexican Heather grows to form flat-topped mounds and is visually striking when used massed together. This is a tough plant. It thrives with little care and is not bothered by pests.

*Cuphea llavea*—This plant, also known as Bat-faced Cuphea, is named for its unusual flowers which look like the face of a bat in shades of purple and scarlet red. It’s easy to grow, is low maintenance, drought-tolerant, and heat loving. This is one plant that your children or grandchildren will love looking at because the flowers will remind them of Mickey Mouse.
Cuphea ignea—The species name *ignea* is Latin for fire and describes this plant’s brilliant orange flowers. It has several common names including Cigar Flower and Cigarette Plant. The flowers are skinny and tubular. This plant will typically grow to be about three feet high with a similar spread. The leaves are dark green and lance shaped.

*Cuphea micropetala*—This plant is known as the Giant Cigar Flower or Candy Corn Plant, again due to its magnificent orange and yellow flowers. This is one of the largest Cupheas and will reach five to six feet in height with a spread of three to four feet.

So, if you are looking for tough, low-maintenance plants that will bloom throughout the summer and attract butterflies, bees and hummingbirds, you may want to try some of the Cupheas. These plants are truly non-stop bloomers and love the summer heat.

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