

Pentas lanceolata Pentas¹

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Introduction

This upright evergreen shrub or tall perennial becomes 3 to 4 feet tall and is decorated throughout most of the year in hardiness zones 9 through 11 with many 3-inch-wide, dense clusters of long-tubed, star-shaped flowers (Fig. 1). Available in white, pink, red, and lavender, these blossoms are extremely popular with butterflies and are long-lasting as cut flowers. Hummingbirds enjoy the red-flowered selections. They often visit this flower sooner than any other in the garden. Plants fertilized regularly during the growing season will continue to grow and bloom all during the warm months. It grows year round in central and south Florida. Leaves and stems are covered with fine hairs, and leaves have prominent veins on the undersides.



Figure 1. Pentas

General Information

Scientific name: *Pentas lanceolata*

Pronunciation: PEN-tuss lan-see-oh-LAY-tuh

Common name(s): pentas

Family: *Rubinaceae*

Plant type: perennial; herbaceous

USDA hardiness zones: 8B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Planting month for zone 8: May; Jun; Jul

Planting month for zone 9: Apr; May; Jun; Jul; Aug

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: Feb; Mar; Apr; May; Jun; Jul; Aug; Sep; Oct; Nov; Dec

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: container or above-ground planter; hanging basket; cut flowers; accent; attracts hummingbirds; attracts butterflies; hedge; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size)

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

1. This document is FPS465, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date October 1999. Reviewed February 2014. Visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

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Description

Height: 2 to 3 feet

Spread: 2 to 3 feet

Plant habit: round

Plant density: dense

Growth rate: fast

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: ovate; obovate

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: semi-evergreen

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: not applicable

Fall characteristic: not applicable

Flower

Flower color: pink; lavender; white; purple

Flower characteristic: spring flowering; summer flowering; fall flowering; flower season is longer in zones 9–11

Fruit

Fruit shape: no fruit

Fruit length: no fruit

Fruit cover: no fruit

Fruit color: not applicable

Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: usually with one stem/trunk

Current year stem/twig color: green

Current year stem/twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun

Soil tolerances: clay; sand; acidic; loam

Drought tolerance: moderate

Soil salt tolerances: unknown

Plant spacing: 18 to 24 inches

Other

Roots: not applicable

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Use and Management

Plants can be clipped as a hedge but flower production will suffer. They are best left unclipped so flowers are free to develop on new growth. Flowers last 3 to 5 days after they are cut and brought indoors. Plant on 18- to 24-inch centers for mass plantings.

Tolerant of a wide range of soil types, pentas prefers fertile, well-drained soils, regular moisture, and will grow quickly in full sun or light shade. Plants will flower fairly well with as little as 2 to 3 hours of sun each day. Plants can be dug, cut back, and stored in a container of soil over the winter in climates that receive freezing temperatures. Water occasionally to keep roots from drying out and re-plant and fertilize in the spring. Heavy mulch applied over the crown of plants cut back to the ground will help plants overwinter in hardiness zone 8. In most years, plants re-grow from the partially buried stems in the spring.

Dwarf cultivars are available that grow to about 14 inches tall. Propagation is by softwood cuttings, which root easily in soil or water, or by seed.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern, but occasionally mites.

Caterpillars sometimes chew on the foliage.