

Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery Success Sheet No. 72

Mexican Heather

Description

Mexican heather (*Cuphea hyssopifolia*) is a small, tropical, evergreen shrub originating in Mexico and Guatemala. In our climate, however, *Cuphea hyssopifolia* is best grown as an annual.

It is ideal for borders and container gardening. This lacy plant offers a texture like a fern with its small, alternately held, oblong leaves. It has twiggy branches and a horizontal pattern.

It is covered in tiny purple or pink flowers that provide continuous bloom for a great display of colour all summer. *Cuphea hyssopifolia* normally grows from 8 to 15 inches tall and has a spread of 10 to 15 inches. It also is a wonderful plant to have around to attract butterflies. This plant is also valuable for a greenhouse or conservatory, where it will deliver lots of colour and requires little effort.

For something different, try combining it in a planting with its close cousin, cigar plant (*Cuphea ignea*) for a dazzling colour combination of orange and purple.

Propagation

Seeds can be collected from the plants during the summer months and stored until early January. Start seeds indoors in January in a moist soilless growing medium under bright light. Germination usually takes a week and a half after sowing.

Softwood or tip cuttings can also very easily be taken in early autumn before frost, by using a rooting compound and a soilless medium. Please note that *Cuphea hyssopifolia* is not frost hardy and must be brought indoors before the first frost for over wintering.

Light

Cuphea hyssopifolia prefers broken shade as its leaf colour is best under these conditions. It can be grown in full sun, but the plant will lose its rich green colour. When taken indoors, the plant needs bright light but protection it from sunlight.

Water and Fertilizer

Cuphea hyssopifolia prefers a well-drained, moist, fertile soil but will grow in just about any type of soil; however, it does not like having “soggy feet.” It can survive short periods of drought. For best results, keep the soil well watered.

To keep the plants blooming all summer, fertilize them every two weeks with 15-30-15 fertilizer and once a month when indoors.

Pests and Diseases

Cuphea hyssopifolia is quite resistant to pests and diseases; however, they can get mites (small, green insects smaller than aphids). Mites are found on the undersides of leaves and suck juice from the leaves, causing them to turn yellow. Spraying with an insecticidal soap such as Safer’s is a good method of control.

Value

Mexican heather is a wonderful addition for anyone who enjoys a plant that flowers all season long, requires little special care and is resistant to many pests and diseases. Try Mexican heather in your garden, and you will be rewarded with a beautiful plant that will be the envy of all your neighbours.

Ryan Bedford, Class of 2005

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