

## Bat-Face Cuphea - *Cuphea llavea*

Most retail nursery growers never expected the tiny-flowered Mexican heather to take off in the late 80's early 90's with gardening consumers, but it did. However, another surprising variety is the bat-face cuphea. This plant should do well, if not better than the now-tired Mexican heather, particularly in the Round Rock-Austin-San Antonio corridor, where bats are a popular and a major presence. The cuphea is genus of low-growing herbaceous annual or tender perennials.



With the bloom time from late spring-through fall, this is one of the few plants that can withstand our Texas heat, and come through unscathed. The stems become somewhat woody with arching characteristics. Plant them in sun or partial shade with well-drained soil. The plant has a tendency to sprawl, so space them informally about 12-24 inches apart. In early summer, snip the top growth to encourage more branching and additional foliage. They usually grow two feet tall, at most. Fertilize in mid-summer and again in early fall with a balanced slow-release formula.



The red/dark purple/black flowers are just gaudy enough for the easy, xeriscape garden and tolerate our heat and humidity. Although the plant is drought tolerant, supplement watering during the long-hot summer to maximize peak blooming during the early fall.

Use the bat-face cuphea in front of a stand of canna or elephant ears, amongst zinnias, firebush, or tall ornamental grasses. They make a nice ground cover and attract hummingbirds and butterflies as an added benefit.

Perhaps the reason this plant isn't more popular is when it's ready to be planted in spring, the blooming period hasn't taken off. Consumers unfamiliar with the cuphea choose something with numerous showy blooms. But in the search for interesting, xeriscape plants, the bat-face cuphea should be considered more often.

Propagation by softwood cuttings, or seedhead/pod collection when flowers fade, allow pod to dry. 'Georgia Scarlet' and 'Tiny Mice' are popular cultivars.