Have you heard of the Texas Super Stars? Are they a new ball team? No, they are plants (flowering annuals and perennials, trees, shrubs, and vegetables) that have passed rigorous testing by Texas A&M horticulturists. Texas A&M University started a program about studying plants to find ones that stand up to all Texas growing conditions. The Texas A&M Research and Extension Center in Dallas is the home of the Texas Super Star Program. This team of researchers seeks outstanding plants that have become adapted to Texas climates and soil conditions.

The plants chosen for these trials are exposed to a rigorous statewide testing program. For annual flowers the trials may be as long as three years and as many as eight years for a new woody plant. No pesticides are used in the testing in order to assess the plants ability to resist insects and disease. When testing is completed, only the most outstanding plants are designated Texas Super Stars. A plant that has this distinction will consistently deliver the highest levels of landscape and garden performance. They will prove to be the most adaptable plants and the most pest resistant.

If you love hibiscus but haven't been able to find ones that give you the look that you want in your landscape, look for Texas Super Star perennial hibiscus. There are three cultivars of perennial hibiscus that are star performers. These will survive our harsh summer heat and drying winds. Look for the cultivars, 'Flare', 'Moy Grande', and 'Lord Baltimore'. All three give you stunning color from summer to early fall. They are low maintenance and pest resistant, almost never needing any pesticides. 'Flare' has apple green foliage, large fuchsia red flowers, grows four feet tall, and re-blooms. You will go wild over 'Moy Grande' because the rose-pink blossoms are the largest, open-faced hibiscus flower in the world! It will grow in acid or alkaline soil, giving flushes of blooms throughout the summer. 'Lord Baltimore' shows off its deeply cut, glossy foliage and stunning red flowers. It will grow five feet tall. They are all very adaptable and can be used in large containers.

Before the Texas Super Stars came along, we had to use the annual Coleus in shaded beds; but now, there are two field tested Coleus varieties that will stand up to the hot Central Texas sun! They are 'Plum Parfait' with ruffled, lance-shaped leaves, and 'Burgundy Sun' with large, oval to heart-shaped leaves which are deep, rich burgundy in color. These varieties of Coleus. are very low maintenance for an annual bedding plant. They are extremely easy to grow when planted in well-drained soil and not over watered. Of course, you can still plant them in your shaded beds to give punches of color in shady areas. Plant these where you can get a close up look at their beautifully colored detailed leaves!

Another outstanding plant for your garden is Gold Star Esperanza. It is very heat-tolerant, a Texas native, and highly pest resistant. Its striking masses of golden yellow, trumpet shaped blooms look great in containers to accent an entryway or patio area. It can also be planted in mass in full sun. These four feet tall plants will give you dazzling color all summer through the first heavy frost.

When shopping for new roses for your garden, seek out these two: 'Marie Daly' and 'Belinda's Dream'. The 'Marie Daly' is an easy care shrub rose with few thorns and lots of fragrant, double pink blooms. It was developed for Texas, and is a new color similar to the renowned antique rose 'Marie Pavie'. It grows three feet tall and is continuous blooming from spring to frost. 'Belinda's Dream' rose grows four feet tall and three feet wide showing off its large, fragrant, double pink blossoms. Both roses are disease tolerant and outstanding performers.

Three Stars that are great additions to any garden are the Mexican Bush Sage, Dwarf Mexican Petunia, and Trailing Lantana. These are tough, drought tolerant, highly pest resistant and will be a stand out in your garden. Be sure to look for the Texas Super Star label when selecting new plants. You can be assured that these plants will be high performers in your garden. A small sum of each sale goes back to Texas A&M to fund additional research into new landscaping plants.

Included in this group of Texas Super Stars are also vegetables, trees, and shrubs. Buying these proven plants gives you good choices on dependable plants. You can enjoy seasons of colorful blooms that are low maintenance. Look for them at the local garden centers this spring. Plant and enjoy these Stars! To see a complete listing, search the Texas A&M Horticulture website.