



ALONG CAME A SPIDER FLOWER

Whenever there is a new-release plant on the market I am always asked to put a few in at Hunter Valley Gardens to see how they go and provide feedback on how well the plant did or didn't do.

About six months ago I was given some Cleome "Senorita Rosalita" by a grower friend who assured me that the plant would exceed all expectations. Well, I laughed and bet him a case of beer that they would be dead in six months, and laughed a bit more. It is now six months on and I have given him his case of beer and am eating plenty of humble pie.

For those who don't know, Cleome is also known as the spider flower and has quite an elegant pink flower. The problem is that it only lasts a season, gets tall and scrappy-looking and tends to self-seed everywhere. So when I was told that this new Cleome is not only a true perennial but also compact and never sets seed it sounded too good to be true, hence the case of beer.

Cleome "Senorita" is like no other Cleome. Flowering through spring, summer and autumn in most areas with very little effort, it has proven to be a very resilient, stunning plant.

Native to Central America, it needs full sun for best results and will only grow up to 60 centimetres high. It has a naturally branching habit and the dark green foliage holds to the plant from the ground up. The flowers are lavender pink in colour and are produced on the new growth, and because it does not produce seed the plant is self-cleaning.

Cleome "Senorita" has many uses in the garden from being incorporated into perennial gardens through to being planted in groups or made into a hedge as well as being particularly versatile in pots. There are very few pest problems for this plant and it is extremely drought-tolerant. It only needs a feed three times a year and a light prune of the new growth to keep it flowering.

You should be able to find this plant in most nurseries, and while it can look a little unassuming and underwhelming in a pot, I would have to say it has been one of the better new releases this season. Sean O'Brien is the horticultural manager of Hunter Valley Gardens. Readers can email questions to weekender@theherald.com.au.

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