



Cooperative Extension Service
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

*Cuphea hyssopifolia*¹

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Introduction

This compact, low branching, dense shrublet is ideal for ground cover use or as an edging (Fig. 1). The arching stems are covered by finely-textured leaflets which are set off by small purple, pink, or white flowers (depending on the cultivar) much of the year. Although flowers are small, they are plentiful and cover the plant for much of the year. Planted on 2-foot centers, a dense ground cover forms in several months. False Heather could be grown as an annual in northern climates.

General Information

Scientific name: *Cuphea hyssopifolia*

Pronunciation: KOO-fee-uh hiss-soe-pif-FOLE-ee-uh

Common name(s): False Heather, Mexican Heather, Heather

Family: *Lythraceae*

Plant type: ground cover; shrub

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

Planting month for zone 8: year round

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: naturalizing; edging; hedge; border; mass planting; attracts butterflies; 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 1. False Heather.

Height: 1 to 2 feet

Spread: 2 to 3 feet

Plant habit: spreading

Plant density: dense

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: fine

Foliage

Description

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: linear
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaf blade length: less than 2 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: purple; white; pink
Flower characteristic: year-round flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: elongated
Fruit length: less than .5 inch
Fruit cover: dry or hard
Fruit color: unknown
Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: not particularly showy; typically multi-trunked or clumping stems
Current year stem/twig color: brown
Current year stem/twig thickness: thin

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun
Soil tolerances: loam; acidic; clay; sand; acidic; alkaline
Drought tolerance: high
Soil salt tolerances: poor
Plant spacing: 24 to 36 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding plant: plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more
Invasive potential: may self-seed each year

Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

Use and Management

Tolerant of many soil types, False Heather needs ample moisture to become established in full sun or partial shade, frequent light fertilizations, and appreciates a thick mulch of organic matter. Tips can be pinched to encourage bushiness and more compact growth, although the cultivar 'Allyson' does not need this due to its naturally compact form. Older plants may be rejuvenated in early spring or late winter with severe pruning or shearing. False Heather may be killed to the ground during cold weather in USDA hardiness zones 8 and 9 but will sprout from the base of the stem, particularly if the base of the stem is covered with several inches of mulch. Bees of several kinds frequent the plants in the warm months.

Propagation is by tip cuttings or seeds. Seedlings can be collected and transplanted as they sprout beneath existing plants in the landscape. Seedlings can be found in other parts of the landscape as they are carried in rain runoff water.

The cultivar 'Allyson' is denser and more floriferous with larger leaves. 'Mexican Heather White' has white flowers and is very vigorous under Florida conditions.

Pests and Diseases

Problems include nematodes, mites, and occasional caterpillars. Nematode infestations can weaken plants and lead to decline. A flea beetle rapidly defoliates plants.