



Sallie Lee
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News Release

Angel's Trumpet

Question: I've grown what we call "Angel's Trumpet" plants for several years and have recently heard they have some questionable characteristics. It is a beautiful plant, one that my aunt gave me seeds for from her plant years ago. Can you tell me something about the plant, its history, its uses in the landscape, etc?

Answer: Angel's Trumpet, also known as *Brugmansia* or *Datura*, are really two different plants that belong in the same Solanaceae family as several other familiar ornamental and edible materials. Informally known as the "nightshade" or "potato" family, it includes mandrake, deadly nightshade, chili pepper, potato, tomato, eggplant, tobacco, and petunia.

Brugmansia is a tropical looking plant known for its large, exotic blossoms. Although many times confused with *Datura*, another closely related plant, it is the *Brugmansia* which we normally associate with "Angel's Trumpet," the large, woody shrub with pendent (hanging down) flowers and seedpods that look like beans. *Brugmansias* grow from 5 feet tall and wide to 10-12 feet in height and width, indicating the likelihood of a specimen plant when in full bloom. Leaves can grow to 12" long, while blooms reaching 8-12" long are found in shades of cream, pink, yellow, orange and peach. Some blooms are very fragrant, while crushed leaves are described as 'odorous.'

Growing *Brugmansia* is not difficult; it prefers a sunny spot (morning sun with light afternoon shade is good), with well-drained yet moist soil that contains generous proportions of organic matter. Too much soil moisture usually results in a slow, lingering death for the plant. In this part of Alabama, *Brugmansias* and *Daturas* are treated as annuals, but some gardeners swear that if heavily mulched, they survive our winters just fine. However, it is recommended that they be planted in a protected area on the south or west side of a house to give them a better chance of overwintering.

While Angel's Trumpet is actively growing in spring and summer, give it plenty of water and a balanced, water-soluble fertilizer about every two weeks. Prune them only after they finish flowering, and in fall/winter, back off the water and stop feeding them.

Daturas, on the other hand, grow lower to the ground, have upward or sideways pointing flowers, and rounded, spiny seedpods. *Daturas* have similar site requirements; fertile, moist,

well-drained soils but full sun is preferred. *Datura metel*, also called “Horn of Plenty”, includes selections named ‘Alba’ (white blooms), ‘Aurea’ (yellow blooms), and ‘Caerulea’ (blue blooms). Some species self sow with abandon and seedlings are easy to transplant, thereby earning the ‘pass-along plant’ moniker. *Daturas* are easy to propagate from seeds, which pop out of seed capsules in late summer

Many of us have seen blooming *Brugmansia* occupying a prominent spot in older landscapes and side yards, but both *Brugmansia* and *Datura*, like members of some human families, have “shady” pasts, including use as a mind-altering drug for shamans and witch doctors. In fact, the Solanaceae family is considered to be an ethnobotanical one, meaning it is used in many ways by humans. And, although a source of food, spice, and medicine, many Solanaceae species are full of alkaloids that can be extremely toxic to animals and humans. While the plant’s toxicity depends on age, where it is growing, and local weather conditions, cultures, including ours, have used *Datura* as pain killers, anti-spasmodics, treatment for Parkinson’s disease, and for relieving asthma.

Daturas are propagated by seeds or root divisions, and are pollinated by night-flying sphinx moths, which look and act like small hummingbirds. However, honey bees and other insects are attracted to the flower’s fragrance and squeeze into the blooms before they open.

Since its qualities can be used for positive or negative effects, with a narrow margin between a ‘helpful dose’ and a ‘lethal dose,’ Angel’s Trumpet is not a plant with which to experiment. Despite its landscape attributes, it definitely should not be grown where it will be accessible by small children.

To learn more about Angel’s Trumpet, please contact Urban Regional Extension Agent Sallie Lee at the St. Clair County Extension Office by calling (205) 338-9416 or email leesall@aces.edu.



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