

Win Some: Lose Some

In these days of high (read 'hot') summer we do indeed appreciate those plants that bring bright color to our July borders. Daylilies, for example, come in every color except true blue and are splendid for filling the gap while the roses recharge. This year early rains produced more spathes than usual, each bursting with promise. In my garden it was a promise soon broken. The deer have left nothing but denuded stems.

The lilies as well are decimated. 'The Fairy' rose was along their route and was sheared. 'The Fairy' will recover quickly and will probably be eaten several times between now and Christmas. But gardeners really mind the loss of flowers on those plants that do not readily rebloom.

Don't even think hosta! This morning I noticed a single lonely lavender and white flower waving forlornly over what was once a clump of 'Halcyon' hosta. Odd that that single stem escaped the bunnies. The deer pull the large leaves off leaving a mess of ragged leaves and stems, but rabbits are more patient, nibbling them to the ground. It is the deer as well that eat the tall lily's leaves off the stems along with any buds within reach.

This is the first year the sedum 'Autumn Joy' has been eaten and the tops munched off the tall garden phlox. The black-eyed Susans, *Rudbeckia fulgida* 'Goldstrum' which are beginning to flower are still intact as are the coneflowers, which have popped up unexpectedly where they were never planted. Coneflowers, *Echinacea purpurea*, have been greatly glamorized but the common sort is the one that returns year after year with few problems. Monarda, too, happily fails the taste test. This bee balm and its relatives have a way of making themselves at home. Easy to pull out if they intrude but how could there be a wrong place for this cheerful tall skinny stem with its ragged bright red topknot?

Shasta daisies are spared, reminding us that it is a common variety because it is a survivor. Even small insects that trim the petals from coneflowers and *Rudbeckia* don't bother daisies. By choosing different cultivars, you can have these charmers for months.

The deer-proof *Cleome* has not reappeared this year. This spider flower usually reseeds but I may have weeded out the seedlings in attacking the persistently aggravating Japanese stilt grass. Or I may have mulched that spot? Self-seeders seem to persist more easily in bare batches, but then so do weeds. You never expect perfection or you would not tend a garden.

Among the winners in my garden this year is the Little Leaf Linden, *Tilia cordata*, which still sports its highest leaves. Usually the arrival of the Japanese beetles in June reduces the upper branches to bare stems decorated with lacy remnants. There is only slight evidence of damage in the highest leaves of the neatly pyramidal tree for the first time in memory. It flowers in mid-summer, cymes of light green leaves and quarter-inch ball-buds are inconspicuous among the dark shiny leaves. The little buds open to raggedy pale yellow flowers, not traffic-stopping but agreeable. The Little Leaf Linden is recommended as a good choice for our area.

I've only plucked four Japanese beetles off the roses this year. I am loathe to remark on such a stroke of luck for fear they will descend in a swarm by morning. Is this a poor season for beetles? Another beetle, the firefly, seems to be in short supply: that would be a shame- win some, lose some.

CABBAGES & KINGS

There is something in the seasonal cycle of life on a farm that makes one wish the pattern to continue. Although we know in our heads that change is the only constant, we still want, in our hearts, to hold on to the way things were, to do everything as it has always been done. But today in farming there is a combination of old and new that is gaining credence. “No-till” or planting through the residue left behind the last harvest, has been around for nearly twenty years and now it is being combined with ‘organic’.

No-till agriculture results in sequestering carbon in the soil as it is not churned up and exposed to wind and weather. The organic element in the no-till process is to use no

herbicides. The cover crop is not killed but just knocked down. What makes it harder than it looks is that it has to be flattened at the right time and in a correct fashion.

At the front of the tractor a cork-screwed roller-crimper knocks down the cover crop and at the rear of the tractor is a device that puts the hole, then the seed, through the remnants of the cover crop. This sounds like a work in progress, but knowing farmers’ ability to cope with challenge, eventually they will make it profitable. To apply this organic no-till method to a home garden check out this organic gardening site. <http://www.eartheasy.com/blog/2009/01/no-till-gardening/>