

Your Own: a garden like no other

In this hot and sticky July declare your independence from fashions in gardening, from the newest, the brightest, the biggest! Garden products are a healthy thriving business, for which we are grateful, and business depends to an extent on advertising. However, we need to separate what is merely fun to read about from what our own gardens can't do without. It is only reasonable to assume that not all these wonderful novelties will succeed everywhere and experimenting can be expensive.

Over time it is the natives that have adapted to the stress of our hot and humid summers and these provide the backbone of our most successful gardens. One such plant is the obedient plant, *Physostegia virginiana*. It is hardly obedient, popping up in the oddest spots but easily recognized in early spring as not just another weed by square stems with toothed leaves. It blooms mid-summer and mingles well with other self-seeding perennials like coneflowers (*Echinacea*), black-eyed Susans (*Rudbeckia*), *Gaura*, and *Coreopsis*.

For those without space enough for a massing of native plants, containers will do. For a shady spot think ferns. Christmas fern (*Polystichum arcostichoides*), fairly low-growing and nearly evergreen, is a tidy addition to a pot. Lady fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*) is perennial but deciduous although it lasts through fall with its graceful feathery fronds to three feet long.

For a small green plant for containers, the native ginger is a pretty choice. *Asarum canadense* has brownish spring flowers that usually stay hidden in the leaves. It may be said that the non-native gingers have shinier and more interesting foliage. A plant that appears uninvited in our area and can be used in a container for a sunny spot is geranium *maculatum*, the wild geranium. [It should not to be confused with *Pelargonium*, the plant with clusters of vivid blooms we call geranium.] This plant has lacy foliage liberally sprinkled with silver-dollar sized pink and purple flowers. It flops neatly over the edges of containers as well as do summer asters.

Other natives that can be used in containers include false or wild indigo (*Baptisia australis*) golden *coreopsis*, purple poppy mallow (*Callirhoe involucrate*) and phlox *paniculata*. A container using these unprepossessing plants won't have the *éclat* you see in those gorgeous mammoth displays that greet you in conference centers, but they do last for months and are easy to care for.

Pet lovers might say that gardens can be classified as cat gardens or dog gardens. Cat gardens, of course, require staff while dog gardens have one overworked master, the homeowner. Last month in England I saw both. Castle gardens and Botanical gardens rich in plants collected assiduously from around the world and tended expertly are as aristocratic as a Persian cat.

A delight to visit and learn from, they are poised, elegant, well-staffed, perfect. In the Oxford Botanical Garden I watched a staff person gather an armload of fragrant sweet peas. She explained they must be picked so as not to go to seed and stop blooming. What a delicious chore! The Botanical garden also had a remarkable collection of *Euphorbias*, some of them decidedly weird.

In walking streets and riding buses, we saw lots of lovely dog gardens. From small enclosed front gardens to plant lined walks and window boxes, flowers were everywhere! Billows of flowering shrubs, masses of lupins, Canterbury bells (*Campanula* with bells as large as a baby's fist), St. John's wort (*Hypericum*) their golden cups decorated with those astonishing stamens were in abundance. There were delphinium, lilies, daylilies in profusion and geraniums tangled at their feet. They were friendly, informal, a bit weedy, but as charming as a basket of puppies. So blessedly civilized!

To file under “Something to do on my summer vacation”

From a friend’s passalong clipping, I learned of the new rose garden at Richmond’s Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden and I also learned that one impetus for the development of roses not requiring continual and expensive care came about as a result of Germany’s prohibition of pesticide use in public gardens. The new rose garden at Lewis Ginter has 9000 square feet and 1800 rose bushes. Surely it deserves a visit! The address is 1800 Lakeside Avenue and for more information www.lewisginter.org. Among the disease resistant cultivars are Country Song, Oranges ‘n lemons, Cherry Parfait, Home run, and Brigadoon.