

GARDENING/HORTICULTURE NEWSLETTER April 2007

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Big Vincas, Summer Snapdragons, Butterfly Magnets Top Suggestions For 2007 Flower Gardens

Knockout Roses, Blushing Brides, Purple Pixie, Tightwad Add Ease Of Care, Color To AR Spring Gardens

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BIG VINCAS, SUMMER SNAPDRAGONS, BUTTERFLY MAGNETS TOP SUGGESTIONS FOR 2007 FLOWER GARDENS

Big vincas, summer snapdragons and a handful of plants that are butterfly magnets are among the new varieties of annuals and perennials that Arkansas gardeners might consider in 2007.

ANNUALS

- **TITAN VINCA** – For Arkansas gardeners looking to add a big colorful showing to their spring and summer garden, the Titan F1 series of vincas is a terrific choice. The Titans have big flowers in an incredible variety of pinks, whites, lavenders and center vs. petal contrast. Best of all, for Arkansas gardens, this series continues to look great through our summer heat and even drought. **The Titans like the sun and are disease tolerant.** The Arkansas Master Gardeners trialed this plant last season, and it was fantastic.

- **ANGELONIA ANGELMIST** – For vertical contrast in the garden try the Angelonia AngelMist. Also known as the Summer Snapdragon, Angelonia will produce full spikes of white or purple flowers that rise to just under 2 feet. **Ensure plenty of sun.**

- **FANFARE IMPATIENS** – For lavish mounds of color that starts in late spring and keeps producing blooms through summer's heat, plant Fanfare Impatiens: This impatiens is terrific, no matter what style of garden you have. Because of its trailing habit, the Fanfare will also work great in containers or hanging baskets. Look for the Fanfare in fuchsia, blush, lavender, orange, pink and coral. **While they love the sun, the Fanfare could use a little afternoon shade.**

PERENNIALS

- **IRISH EYES (Rudbeckia hirta)** – Not all green-eyed monsters are bad. The Irish Eyes Rudbeckia hirta is a green-eyed beauty that will produce quite a show in the Arkansas summer garden. The Irish Eyes selection produces a huge, single, gold daisy with a big green eye. As with its fellow Rudbeckias, this one will be very attractive to butterflies. **The daisy likes the sun and is deer and rabbit resistant and drought tolerant once it's established.**

- **SUNSET ECHINCEA** – Butterflies can't resist a coneflower and Arkansas gardeners may not be able to resist the unusual color that Sunset brings to the landscape.

Most people are used to seeing the more common purple coneflower, but this hybrid brings a deep red-orange to the summer garden mix. Like others of its family, **the Sunset likes full sun to partial shade and is drought tolerant.**

KNOCKOUT ROSES, BLUSHING BRIDES, PURPLE PIXIE, TIGHTWAD ADD EASE OF CARE, COLOR TO ARKANSAS SPRING GARDENS

This year's garden beds in Arkansas may be full of Knockouts, Blushing Brides and Tightwads. Those are among the releases Arkansans should consider adding to their landscape.

There are a lot of interesting releases this year, from easier-to-grow roses, to Chinese fringeflowers that won't take over the entire backyard. Whether you're trying to deal with sun or shade, there's something new for nearly every garden this year.

- **SHRUB ROSES** – Shrub roses are a superb plant for the full sun. The challenge for the home gardener is the effort related to disease control on hybrid tea roses. New series such as Knockout and the very red Home Run are easier to grow and less susceptible to powdery mildew and blackspot diseases. **Knockout, with its flowers ranging from light red to deep pink, was a 2000 All-American Rose selection.**

- **BIGLEAF HYDRANGEAS** – The Bigleaf Hydrangea is the hot **shade plant** for this decade. There is a tremendous interest in selections that flower on new wood – called 'remontant.' New varieties to watch for include: Midnight Duchess, Mini Penny, and Lady in Red. Blushing Bride starts as a white bloom, maturing into a light pink blush.

- **GLOSSY ABELIA** – **A butterfly gardener's delight**, the trade is now boasting some great new Abelias. Kaleidoscope, Canyon Creek and Rose Creek are the result of additional breeding and selection and represent new variations in plant size, foliage color and blooming traits. Kaleidoscope takes its name from the changes in foliage color through the seasons.

- **CHINESE FRINGEFLOWER** – Once the hot plant for the 1990s, some gardeners turned their backs on the fringeflower due to the potential for it to grow to a very large size. However, new introductions such as Purple Pixie, Snow Muffin and Bill Wallace are worth a look. For example, the Purple Pixie, with its deep purple foliage and matching flowers, is so low profile; it's nearly a ground cover. **Fringeflower likes the sun and moist soil.**

- **CRAPEMYRTLES** – There are lots of crapemyrtle additions to the marketplace and most focus on smaller plant size. Selections worth looking at include: the rosy pink Rosey Carpet, developed by Bob Hambuchen of Conway, and The Dazzle series

from the University of Georgia. Another section worth considering is the Tightwad, which will bring a rich red to the landscape.

For more information on gardening, visit www.arhomeandgarden.org.

CRAPE MURDER IS A SERIOUS CRIME IN ARKANSAS

There is a term for the topping of crape myrtles: Janet Carson, Extension Horticulture Specialist, calls it crape murder. It reduces the plant's health.

Each year, many people often cut the tops out of trees that have grown too large in their landscape. Power companies will top them when they threaten to interfere with lines.

Most people have seen their share of ugly trees created by topping.

What you end up with is a lot of unattractive bushiness and heavy foliage. Worse, you end up with a lot of weak limbs, and sometimes the tree dies.

Sometimes, trees are topped because they've grown so tall, they interfere with power lines.

Extension service recommends that you look up before you plant a tree. Consider the potential tree size and the space you have available before you plant. Bradford pears, for instance, are pretty trees, but they aren't really made for small spaces. They can eventually block the view of the home and shade large areas of your grass.

Ideally, a homeowner should cut down a tree that interferes with power lines or blocks a home and then replant with a tree that's more size appropriate.

But, unfortunately, many homeowners choose to top a tree rather than take it down and plant the right size tree.

It defies logic why we top trees. They're majestic, and we come along and whack them back.

Topping not only creates an ugly tree, but it hurts the tree, resulting in structural weakness. In some cases, topping can reduce flowering potential of the tree.

There are legitimate reasons for pruning a tree, but no good reasons to top a tree, even though we see it routinely. It's sad, but even professional companies do it.

Once you start this practice, the natural habit and shape of the plant is permanently altered. Homeowners often top a tree again and again over the years.

If your goal is to reduce tree size, spend the money once and remove the tree and replace it with a smaller-growing variety more suitable for the location.

Anytime of the year is okay to remove disease, damaged or dead wood from a tree. But, in general, you should prune just before rapid growth in the spring when deciduous trees are still dormant.

At this time of year, it's easy to see tree structure, there is less weight with no leaves being present and we have passed the season with winter damage from ice and snow.

But, think before you cut.

Before you decide to prune, have a good reason to do it. Just because you're angry at your co-workers or neighbors, you shouldn't take it out on your trees.

There's only one valid technique for pruning trees – crown thinning, or selective thinning of branches.

Limbing up, or removing lower limbs, to allow more clearance for walking and mowing is acceptable, but remove limbs back to their point of origin such as the tree trunk or the branch they're attached to.

Extension service receives numerous calls about trees such as sugar maple and river birch "bleeding" when they're pruned. Don't panic. It's just sap flowing through the tree, and there's no need to worry. You shouldn't use a wound dressing where the sap is leaking out.

For help with picking a suitable tree or crapemyrtle in your landscape, contact the Extension office or go to www.uaex.edu.

CAMELLIA (Dr. Gerald Klingaman, Retired Extension Horticulture Specialist)

One of life's supreme ironies must be that out of tragedy, advances are made. But thanks to a meteorological fluke, camellias, long considered unsuited for gardeners living out of the camellia belt, can now be grown as far north as St. Louis.

The winter hardy camellias, mostly hybrids between *Camellia oleifera*, *C. hiemalis* and *C. sasanqua*, are dark evergreen shrubs reaching 6 to 10 feet in height in 10 years. Depending on the cultivar, 3-inch blooms in shades of white, pink and rose appear from late September until the first really hard freeze. Plants are sprawling and open while young, but eventually form respectable presence in the garden.

The U.S. National Arboretum is situated along the eastern border of Washington D.C., and has a climate much like that of Little Rock. In the late 1950s, the arboretum began development of their Asian collection which included an extensive collection of fall and spring blooming camellias.

These beauties thrived until two devastating back-to-back winters during 1977 to 1979. Not only did the Chesapeake Bay freeze solid during the 1977-78 winters, but almost all of the 900 plants in the camellia collection were killed outright or froze to the ground.

But amongst the destruction, one plant was completely unscathed – a forlorn, small, white flowered ugly duckling called *Camellia oleifera*. This species is widely grown in China, but not for its flowers. Instead seeds are harvested and an oil extracted for cooking and use in cosmetics.

Using this plant and another selection, Dr. William Ackerman named 'Plain Jane,' the cold-tolerant camellia hybrids were developed from over 10,000 hand crosses over the next 15 years. Initial crosses were made between 1979 and 1981 with back crosses made between 1980 and 1984. From these crosses, Ackerman raised 2,500 seedlings which were evaluated in cold areas from Pennsylvania to the mountains of North Carolina.

The fall flowering camellias – often referred to as the Frost Series Camellias – were released in 1992 and have revived interest in camellias in much of USDA zone 6b. Ackerman, who is now retired but breeding camellias, has written a book entitled *Beyond the Camellia Belt*, which will be released next spring. Eventually, Ackerman named and released 34 fall flowering selections that are winter hardy to -10 degrees.

If you garden in the traditional camellia belt these winter hardy camellias offer little improvement over existing hybrids. But, if you live north of the traditional area – which in Arkansas roughly follows Interstate 40 across the state – they're worth trying.

Plant camellias in a fertile, organic site that can be watered during periods of summer drought. The ideal planting location is an area having morning sun and afternoon shade or filtered shade such as is created by a grove of pines. Too much sun or too much shade reduces bloom numbers. Once established, plants have good drought tolerance.

MEXICAN FEATHER GRASS (*Nassella tenuissima*) (Dr. Gerald Klingaman, Retired Extension Horticulture Specialist)

As ornamental grasses have become mainstream in our gardens, the best have been identified; some have been dropped, while others have been added to fill specific niches in garden design.

One of these grasses is the Mexican feather grass, a low-growing, graceful mound of a plant well suited for low maintenance gardening.

Mexican feather grass (*Nassella tenuissima*) is a 1 - to 2-foot tall perennial bunch grass that grows like a cascading fountain. The wiry, slender, hair like leaves are green and silky in the spring and buff colored during the winter. In spring, it has a more erect habit as the slender, silvery, nodding panicles push above the foliage. In dry sites, it may go dormant in summer and begin growing again when temperatures cool and rains return in the fall.

It's native to parts of west Texas, New Mexico and the north-central states of Mexico where it grows in open, dry woods, on rocky slopes and dry, disturbed areas.

Mexican feather grass hit the garden mainstream in the mid-1990s and has proven much more widely adapted than previously thought.

This grass highlights one of the quandaries gardeners face when deciding what to grow. It's one of the good guys in the landscape because it's easy to grow, drought tolerant, good for xeriscape plantings and pest free. It's a real low-maintenance gem, and it can reseed.

Because it's native to a neighboring state, you might even consider it a native plant. We freely consider plants of the eastern deciduous forest as "natives" though not originally found on our side of the Mississippi River. So, should a plant to the drier regions to our west be any less native?

I don't think Mexican feather grass will jump from being a garden ornamental to a weed in most areas of the eastern United States. It will not survive close mowing and frequent watering in the typical lawn and is too shade intolerant to survive long in shaded beds and borders. It could move into waste places along roadsides where it would have to slug it out with the other weeds – most of which were introduced long ago. It's not an aggressive enough grower in the seedling stage to compete with established pasture grasses.

If *Nassella* is going to escape into the wild it will most likely do so in a climate similar to where it originated. Naturalized stands have been reported in New Zealand, South Africa, California and parts of Australia where it slipped through under the obsolete Latin name of "Stipa".

In the garden, Mexican feather grass is best used in masses as an open, airy, groundcover, for edging beds or to cover steep banks. It has a landscape look similar to that of weeping love grass often used along highway road cuts. It fits well in natural

landscape plantings, rock gardens and in conventional borders where the fine texture plays off of the coarser texture of neighboring plants.

It does best in full sun in a well drained soil. It can be grown from seed or new plants can be propagated by springtime division of the clumps. Because the old foliage persists into the new season, shearing plants back in late winter before new growth begins gives a tidier look. If reseeding is a concern, delay the shearing operation until after the flower scapes have emerged.

For more information on any of the above topics, please feel free to contact me at the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension office at 425-2335.

Sincerely,

Mark D. Keaton,
County Extension Agent-
Staff Chair

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Enc.