

Gardening Made Easier!

The title of this column will raise eyebrows since we know that 'effortless gardening' is an oxymoron, but one of the things that will indeed make gardening easier is to shift the emphasis from perennials to flowering shrubs. Even though in our mind's eye we see rows of flowering perennial plants, color without pause spanning the seasons, the reality is different.

Annuals bloom their little hearts out knowing they have but one year to grow, bloom and make seeds. Perennials flower over several weeks rather than months, guarding their energy for another year. They are wonderful: nothing is lovelier than sweeps of iris, daylilies, lilies. That beauty does not happen without a lot of effort. Shrubs on the other hand do 'just happen' especially if you have been careful to put the right shrub in the right place. They require some pruning from time to time partly because even small shrubs tend to outgrow the dimensions given for our zone 7, possibly because we are moving to zone 8?

Roses in particular are shrubs for colorful borders, specifically those shrub roses bred for disease resistance and healthy foliage. Evergreen shrubs such as Camellias have a long flowering period and they provide winter interest as few deciduous shrubs have such elegant branches without their foliage. A border with both is most satisfying.

Spireas and Abelias come in smaller sizes more appropriate for a border than butterfly bushes. There are newer cultivars of Buddleja that promise to stay small but so many outgrow their space then have to be cut back severely which results in awkward elbows and sulky flowering.

Because the flowers on Abelias are dainty, they don't shout for attention but they bloom over a long period and the new foliage of several of them provides additional color in a border. Spireas are perfect for filling in gaps in a border as they are pleasantly plump and compact plants with pretty new growth and long-flowering umbel-like racemes of flowers in yellow, white, pink, red or purple. Some, such as *S. canescens* can reach to ten feet with a white shower in mid and late summer when so many other shrubs are resting.

Usually we think hedge, prickly hedge, when we read of *Berberis* but they do have attractive yellow flowers and red berries. We have to avoid *B. thunbergii* that is invasive and miserable to pull out with glove-defying thorns. All of these small leaved shrubs offer a textural contrast to large leaved *Hydrangeas*, *Aucuba*, and *Rhododendrons*.

a personal note:

The only time of year writing the garden column becomes a chore is in spring when I dash outside to check the tag on a plant for a proper name. Somehow a weed needs pulling, then another and an hour or so later, I've forgotten why I came outside in the first place.

However, after years of writing this column I began to feel as if I were the dog in the manger: I needed to share the fun with other master gardeners and readers needed new

voices. Because our experiences are varied, we bring different perspectives to the practice of gardening. I don't have grass so I was pleased that Beverly Runton-Moorhouse wrote about grass in April and such fun to read Felicity Ericson's adventure with a pond last week. This week I am delighted to share Susan Camp's experience with moss – one of those subjects that divide gardeners everywhere!

“We live on the edge of a marsh on Cedarbush Creek. It is quiet, peaceful, with plenty of wildlife to watch: egrets, geese, ducks, the occasional otter couples. We have been told by an environmental professional that we have a perfect bayscape. There are cedars and wax myrtles, hollies and wild blueberries. There is also a huge oak tree that shades the center of the little promontory where our house sits. And underneath that tree there is moss! There are tufts and hillocks of moss, different varieties and many shades of green – all causing me much despair.

For 17 years I have looked at this moss, wondering how to change the pH on this northwest side of the property. Finally last fall a speaker at a native plant symposium solved my problem. We have a moss garden!” Susan Camp