Clerodendrums provide unusual, exotic flowers

Plants in the Clerodendrum family, also known as the glorybowers, are popular ornamentals, grown widely for their distinctive and beautiful flowers. While some plants in this family provide spectacular flowers and make wonderful additions to our Florida landscapes, others can cause gardeners to regret the day they ever planted one.

Three clerodendrums that are somewhat behaved and provide unique and beautiful flowers are the blue butterfly bush, the pagoda flower and the bleeding heart vine.

*Clerodendrum ugandense*, or blue butterfly bush (not to be confused with buddleia), is native to Africa and is an erect, medium to large shrub that can reach 12 feet in height. Its blooms are clusters of butterfly or orchid-shaped flowers in combinations of blue, violet and white. These have long stamens that are blue-to-violet with afternoon shade or white in full sun.

Blue butterfly bush performs best in a frostfree climate, but it is root hardy in zones 8 and 9, freezing to the ground in winter, but returning from its roots in spring.

But even more unusual than the blue butterfly bush is the spectacular pagoda flower (*C. paniculatum*). This plant has orange flower spikes that are uniquely tiered like an oriental pagoda. The individual flowers are funnel shaped with long tubes making it an excellent flower to attract hummingbirds.

These plants are erect, open, semi-woody shrubs with large leaves. The shrub sometimes has multiple stems and can be 3 to 5 feet tall and easily spreads to 3 to 5 feet across.

They are native to Southeast Asia and appear to have much more cold tolerance than expected. In Northwest Florida, they can be expected to sprout back in spring after dying to the ground in winter. Very
severe winters may reduce the amount of flowering. Plant it near a south facing wall for added protection from cold winters.

Pagoda flower may produce numerous suckers and spread itself around the garden, but it is not really invasive, and rarely becomes a nuisance. It is, however, a big spreading plant that requires a large space.

One last species I want to share is the bleeding heart vine, *C. thomsoniae*. Bleeding heart is a small vine excellent for partial shade in Florida. The attractive red flowers are surrounded by white calyces—reminiscent of paper lanterns.

The plant’s stems can get 15 feet long, climbing without tendrils, suckers or root hairs, but rather by twining through and around its support. This vine does not spread as much as some, and is therefore a good choice for a restricted support like a doorway arch or container trellis, but not such a good candidate to cover a fence or arbor.

Now for the bad, unruly clerodendrums. The cashmere bouquet (*C. bungei*) is extremely aggressive in nature. Don’t plant it unless you can contain it. Likewise for the harlequin glorybower (*C. trichotomum*) which produces suckers that will spread 30 to 50 feet.

The clerodendrums are in the verbena family, and they should be part of your family, too. Keep in mind, however, that many clerodendrums tend to spread by underground stems and they all need lots of space.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

For additional information about all of the county extension services and other articles of interest go to: [http://santarosa.ifas.ufl.edu](http://santarosa.ifas.ufl.edu).

###