

Friday's Feature**By****Theresa Friday**

January 3, 2010

The 2010 Florida Plants of the Year

The Florida Garden Select program, formerly known as the Florida Plants of the Year program, is designed to promote the use of plants that are reliable in Florida's unique climate. Benefiting growers, garden centers and consumers alike, the Florida Garden Select program highlights plants that are ideal for most Florida gardens. Many of the selected plants can reach outside Florida and into most Southern States.

Bamboo Muhly

This year, one of my favorite ornamental grasses makes the cut. This ornamental grass has fern-like leaves and a lacy texture giving it a "bamboo" look, hence the common name. Bamboo muhly is drastically different than other muhly grasses due to its very fine, delicate texture, providing a totally unique look for the garden.

The growth habit is upward to slightly arching. It has thin stems that reach 4 to 6 feet with airy bright-green foliage. Bamboo muhly will tolerate some drought and grows best in full sun with moist, well-drained soil. It has underground runners that spread slowly, allowing its size to be controlled easily. Bamboo muhly gives a unique and whimsical look to any garden.



Giant Apostles' Iris

Neomarica caerulea 'Regina' is a new introduction from Brazil. This exciting, wide-leafed walking iris has lovely 3 to 4 inch wide purple-blue flowers accented by strikingly brilliant jade foliage, which assumes a more clumping and upright habit than the more common walking iris. The blooms of the iris are rippled with glowing white and exotic splashes of mauve and yellow offering refreshing color and texture. It's a repeat bloomer, producing flushes of flowers in succession, many on the same stalks from February through August, depending upon the size of the clump.

New plants grow out of the flower stalks. The weight causes the stalks to kneel down toward the ground where a new plantlet takes root. As the process is repeated, the iris slowly "walks" from its original location.

This large, tropical Iris is quite easy to grow. 'Regina' is a moderate water user and will reach 4 to 5 foot tall, has a light fragrance and thrives in full sun to partial shade. It tolerates temperatures as low as 20 degrees. It grows well in pots or in the ground. It will grow in partial sun to shade but filtered light is ideal.

Zebra Aloe

Strong visual appeal and a spike with a spectacular cluster of salmon-colored blooms throughout warm months makes this compact, spiny-textured succulent an interesting addition to any garden. Its spotted markings support its well-known common name, zebra aloe.

The bloom spikes fluctuate in height, and can reach to 4' – 6' and are an attractor for hummingbirds, butterflies and bees. It grows well in full sun or partial shade, is drought and heat tolerant, and can withstand coastal conditions with moderate salt spray. While many associate the genus Aloe for its medicinal value, this Aloe is appreciated for its showy appearance and is not generally used in a medicinal capacity. This plant is a winner for succulent gardens, tropical displays or anywhere a unique-looking plant is intended.

Theresa Friday is the Environmental 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.

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