Purple Knight is a Stately Addition to Any Garden

Color is probably one of the most important components in garden design and the first thing most gardeners notice in the landscape. One of the most under appreciated colors is purple.

In the garden, purple has many effects. It adds a touch of coolness to a hot summer landscape. It evokes a sense of majesty and adds passion to the garden. But perhaps one of its best qualities is that purple plays well with others. Purple is the new neutral. It's the one color, besides green, that works in any garden at any time. The color purple is a harmonizer and ties all the other colors of the garden together. Purples can make bright colors pop or fade into the background to accent lighter colors. One of my favorite purple foliage plants is Purple Knight alternanthera. Its scientific name is Alternanthera dentata 'Purple Knight'.

Purple Knight is a stunning, lush and vigorous addition to a sunny to lightly shaded garden. In fact, its deep purple foliage is actually darkest when grown in full sun. And because it has no known serious pests or diseases, this is an environmentally-friendly plant.

Purple Knight is very easy to grow and is as tough-as-nails. It can handle almost any type of weather including very hot, humid conditions. Its dark-purple foliage is striking from early spring through frost. Although listed as an annual or tropical perennial, my Purple Knight has returned for the last two years. This may be due to milder winters or the fact that it’s planted in a protected area.

Purple Knight has a vigorous upright and spreading habit. It can easily reach 16 to 20 inches in height and can spread up to three feet wide. This plant has long internodes so some branches may fall over amplifying its natural spread. If this plant gets a little tall or lanky, simply pinch it back above a set of leaves. While it does flower in late summer, the

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white button-type flowers are not very attractive. This one we grow for the foliage.

Purple Knight is available in seed. Start the seeds indoors about four to five weeks before you want to transplant them into the garden. Set your young plants outdoors when night temperatures are consistently about 60 degrees. Combine a little water during droughty periods with light applications of a slow-release fertilizer in late spring, summer and early fall and this plant will perform effortlessly throughout our long growing season.

So give Purple Knight a try. It is excellent in mixed containers or in a hanging basket. It's terrific as a mid-height filler in mixed beds and borders. The purple foliage blends wonderfully with many colors. For a bold color scheme, try combining it with orange or gold flowers like New Gold lantana or use it behind the chartreuse 'Margarita' ornamental sweet potato. But no matter what you combine it with, you'll find that Purple Knight alternanthera is truly a majestic performer.

Tip of the Week: Many utility companies that supply your home with power, water, telephone, sewer, gas or cable services deliver those services underground. And it may be that these utilities are not buried as deeply as you may think, making them easier to hit when you dig. The result can be costly, both financially and in injury or loss of life.

If you’re beginning a home improvement project that requires digging or adjusting the grade of your property, Sunshine State One Call (SSOCOF) recommends that you call (800) 432-4770 before digging if you don't know exactly where underground utilities are located on your property.

Homeowners are exempt from calling SSOCOF unless you are excavating in the utility easements or where underground facilities are located. For more information visit their website at www.callsunshine.com.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names 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.