

OUT ON A LIMB

‘You should have been here last week’

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Is your garden a ‘should have been here last week’ garden? Does your garden peak for only a couple of weeks out of the year and has little interest the other fifty? Might there be something wrong with that picture?

In Augusta, many gardens are filled with hybrid azaleas and dogwoods and usually around ‘Masters’ they come into their glory. Television broadcasts of the Augusta National during tournament time focus on the beauty of the golf course with the potpourri of azalea color behind each green. Many people from other parts of the county think that is the way Augusta looks all year long.

When I graduated from the University of Georgia in 1966, I moved to Augusta to work at my first job. Speaking with Augustans, I soon found out that if a plant doesn’t bloom the first two weeks of April, it was as popular as a red headed step child (no offense). It became my obsession to educate people that a garden doesn’t have to be one and done but should have interest most of the rest of the year. Think how nice it is to walk out into the garden with your morning cup of coffee and see what surprise is blooming this week. Certainly a garden can peak at a certain time of the year but there is no reason it can’t have spots of interest at other times.

The Encore azalea has taken its place in the market as they bloom in the Spring and again in the Fall. When they first were introduced, my wife and I were at the Atlanta Botanical Garden and as we ate lunch on the terrace, I asked Betty if she noticed anything unusual about the azaleas near that area. They were in bloom and it was November.

I would be remiss if I didn’t mention the Camellia. We have those that bloom in the Spring (*Camellia japonica*) and those that bloom in the Fall (*Camellia Sasanqua*). There are many different cultivars that have a plethora of flowers from red to pink to white. From a design standpoint, plant them with a purpose, don’t just plop them all around the garden.

I love tea olives. I usually smell them before I see them. Did you know that they bloom every month that has an ‘r’; not in the months of May, June, July or August. What southern garden is complete without the summer blooms of the gardenia, of course the white flies come with it. It is November and mine are still in bloom. A most underused plant is Sweetshrub. If you are going to buy one, do it when they are in bloom as not all are fragrant particularly the ones grown from seed.

I like the summer flowering trees such as the Magnolia, Lilac Chase Tree and the Golden Rain, of course everybody has a Crape myrtle. Crape myrtles are becoming over used and are un or over pruned. They have beautiful bark which is something that is overlooked by people that keep whacking them to nubs every year. How about the summer blooming shrubs like the Lime Light Hydrangea, Butterfly Bush, Bottlebrush and Oleander, just to name a few.

Plants that have great fall color certainly have a place in the garden. The Japanese Maples come to mind such as Bloodgood, Coralbark and the weeping variety Tamukeyama. There are winter interest shrubs such as Virginia Sweetspire, Witch hazel, Oakleaf Hydrangea, and American Beautyberry which also has lilac colored berries until December. Dogwoods and Crape myrtles have good Fall color although not prized for that. Were it not for the balls, Sweet gum might be close to the top of the list. For winter leaf color, much as I hate to mention this overused tree, Bradford Pear has great Fall color. I think Gingko is my favorite Fall tree with its golden leaves either on the tree or the golden mat they form on the ground.

I like surprises in the garden. Spider Lily is certainly a plant that comes to mind. Its not there one day and the next, there it is, either red or yellow flowers borne atop a stem that has no leaves. You know, I forgot that I planted it.

You can still say ‘You should have been here last week’ but plan your garden so you can say ‘You need to be here next week’.