

“Something” of the Year plants not so trendy

Just got another e-mail alert about a plant being promoted alluringly as the 2020 Something of the Year. There’s always something.

I don’t generally fall for hype or jump on costly bandwagons that often fizzle. One I do follow is that of the Pantone Color of the Year. Not trying to be fashionable; I humor myself with it to keep my creativity on its toes by painting something in my garden with it and finding plants, pots, and accessories that coordinate with it. This year it’s Classic Blue. Ought to be fun.

My recent Plant of the Year e-mail was from the Herb Society of America, feting “brambles” as this year’s highlight. Not just black, dew or raspberries, but all of them. And to think of all the wild ones I pull every year by the Sisyphian gloveful from my garden!

Not trying to be testy. I appreciate the sincerity and dedication of people who carefully winnow down the field, carefully examine the best contenders, and adopt a singular frontrunner to cheerily champion.

Usually the plant of honor meets multiple criteria such as proven survivability in a wide range of conditions with insect and disease resistance, exceptional beauty or extra good or long production, and unique growth habit; “pollinator friendly” is a current buzz phrase.

And, cynicism aside, it isn’t always just a coordinated marketing ploy to push sales of a pricey new cultivar. Sometimes it’s a genuine effort to reignite a flame of popular interest under a precious heirloom or native plant worth being reintroduced into gardens.

The Mississippi Medalion program brings such plants to our attention but,



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Guerilla gardener Jesse Yancy shares proven hardy plants with neighbors.

unlike national promotions, promotes only those that are adapted to our state’s climate and soils and which could be produced and sold by Mississippi growers and retailers. For the most part they are

all keepers, though a few are a bit tricky for newbie gardeners or are no longer being widely produced. You can find these outstanding shrubs, flowers, veggies and others listed, with photos and descrip-

tions, on the website of the Mississippi Nursery and Landscape Association (MSNLA.org; click on “programs” then Medalion Plants).

Though over the years my garden has become overstuffed with plants brought to my attention through these kinds of promotions, so I farm new ones out.

My neighbor Jesse Yancy is a “guerilla gardener” who has transformed a neglected slice of dirt across from his urban apartment into a nearly overwhelming gallimaufry of vegetables, herbs, flowers, vines, bulbs and anything else he can glean cheaply or free. They’re obliged to be robust because, though he’s a nurturing gardener he doesn’t have the resources or time to coddle.

So I often hand over to him any newly-heralded plants that have been sent or given to me by promoters, and then watch from his curb. If they thrive in Jesse Lee’s conditions, and wows him with their performance, then I’ll give

‘em a go in my own garden the next year.

Some favorites, such as African Blue basil, Tuscan kale, orange Profusion zinnias, Burgundy okra, blackeyed Susan vine and the antique Mutablis rose, have become mainstays for us both, and are spreading amongst neighbors - a true indicator of long-haul success.


As for the herb society’s latest plant celebrity, I’m gonna pass. I usually wait for my wild dewberries to flower before I pull them, partly for the pretty and partly for pollinators, but leave just enough come back every year to keep this seasonal dance going without becoming too onerous.

Not being untrendy-grouchy, I just don’t want 2020 to become the Year A Trendy Plant Ate My Garden.

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