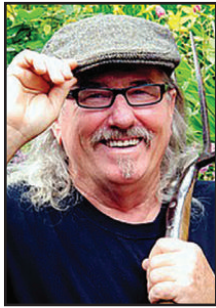


Color coordinations and edible pullings

I had an unexpected pastel delight in my veg patch this week, when my sweet potatoes started flowering. As luck would have it, one vine had crept around a purple-leaf basil whose small edible flowers share the same pink throats.

I had planted them both partly for good eats and partly because they are, well, pretty plants. Multiple benefits are important in small gardens where detail is everything.



FELDER RUSHING

Every year I stick out ornamental sweet potatoes, both the purple leaf and chartreuse kinds, mostly as ornamental ground covers or for spilling out of large containers. And they do make small, irregular but edible tuber roots.

Anyway, this year I took advantage of stay-at-home orders to plant more vegetables than I usually do; most years I travel abroad and depend on stuff that doesn't need close attention or regular watering, and depend on those that generally fare well on their own and blend well with low-maintenance flowers and shrubs.

The easiest summer veggies that I plant as much for looks as food include gourds, several different colorful peppers, and okra, with its simple hibiscus flowers and ornamental pods; I always plant the kind with burgundy leaves and pods.

But this spring I set out scattered potager-style patches of others, including small stands of corn tied up with climbing Louisiana



Sweet potato and basil pastels.

purple pod beans and underplanted with squash; this ancient "three sisters" combination looks good texture-wise, and produces well. And I interplanted with regular sweet potatoes as a groundcover with a superb fall harvest.

White-fruited eggplant would be fine, too, but I feel guilty not eating them. Sounds heretic, but I simply dislike the big berry's "mouth-feel" - but then I really can't stand slimy okra either; thank goodness for cornmeal, hot oil,

and ketchup! Don't like mushrooms either, and nope, you can't change my mind.

My favorite culinary herbs for double duty as flowers include several different basils, oregano, chives, both shrub and cascading rosemary, and the perennial marigold called Mexican mint marigold or sometimes Mexican tarragon because its anise-flavored leaves are an excellent substitute for nearly impossible-to-grow French tarragon. The native Mexican perennial marigold is so drought hardy, and because its brilliant yellow flowers appear just in time for Day of the Dead celebrations, it's commonly planted on Latino graves.

With my three sisters pretty well played out now, last week I reworked their spaces and started planting fall stuff. I sowed a packet each of carrots and beets, knowing full well that the seeds cost more than I spend all year on those inexpensive foods. With a daily sprinkling they came right up in the warm soil. In a couple of weeks, I'll thin the plants, using the pullings in salads and leaving elbow room for the leftovers to reach their

potentials; overcrowding is one of the easiest production-busting mistakes new gardeners make.

But I left room for seeding colorful lettuces and other greens in a couple of weeks, and for transplants of other cool-season veggies such as broccoli, cabbage, and the like. It's nearly time.

But back to the pretty part. The big flowers of sweet potatoes prove that they are in the same family as morning glories, and look all the world like those old-fashioned reseeding petunias with pale lavender, pink, and white flowers that smell so sweet. And to have mine flower alongside basil, the flowers of which are also white with pink tinges, was unplanned lagniappe.

So, my summer experiment has segued into fall, and soon, with the addition of garlic and winter-hardy parsley, into winter and next spring. This forced stay-at-home is turning downright productive.

Felder Rushing is a Mississippi author, columnist, and host of the "Gestalt Gardener" on MPB Think Radio. Email gardening questions to rushingfelder@yahoo.com.

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CROSSWORD PUZZLE

ACROSS

- 1) Bygone period

5) "Head" or "heart" hurt

9) Some finger foods

14) Better this than never

15) Answered "not guilty"

16) Notre Dame faithful?

17) Archer on Olympus

18) Gave money for

19) Recess for a statue

20) Space shuttle part

23) Wind up or wind down

24) Sturdy furniture material

25) End product

28) Leather piercer

29) Pouring vessel

31) Bit of sunlight

32) Current units

35) Punishment's partner

36) Squid's weapon

37) Atlas, encyclopedia or dictionary
- 41) Bleacher feature

42) Finish in the money

43) Who-knows-how-long

44) Beverage in a yard

45) Sunroof option

46) Drill sergeant's title

48) Big game fisherman's catch

50) Antiquated

51) Blue ____ (cops' sick-out)

54) Dances, in old slang

58) Part of a power saw

60) "____ and Otis" (film)

61) Fish tank organism

62) Iraqi city

63) Make ready

64) Metal refuse

65) "Man of ____" (Superman)

66) Theatrical trappings

67) Sitcom role for Nabors

DOWN

- 1) USMA rookie

2) Hank, of baseball fame

3) Honored the flag

4) Trueheart of comics

5) Take it to a higher court

6) Second half of an exploring duo

7) Beneficiary

8) Taro corn

9) Mister fix-it, typically

10) Springtime arrival

11) Forming mental images of

12) A tray may hold it

13) Common pronoun

21) It may be covered by insurance

22) Oreo innards

26) Tilting weapon

27) Nursery denizens

28) Assume the role of interviewer

29) Put up a building

30) Legitimate deduction

32) The "A" in James A. Garfield

33) Money, in slang

34) Political source of influence

35) Start of some juice blend names

38) Not mandatory

39) Self indulging escapade

40) Stirrup's spot

46) Single-masted vessels

47) Prenuptial agreement?

49) The longest river in France

50) Little wise bird

51) Young mare

52) Conforming to the rules

53) Customary habit

55) Mischief-makers

56) Leprechauns' home

57) Exhibit shock

58) Breakers' equipment

59) It may be passed

A HAUNTING WE WILL GO

By Rob Lee

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