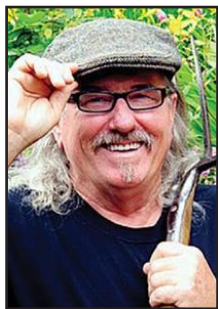


Care to join me?

This heat is one thing, us up to enjoy the fruits of but I stopped searching my our labor in the evening thesaurus for synonyms for from the vantage of a porch insufferable humidity when, swing, hoping for a breeze right after “suffocating” I as the cicadas start to sergot to “thick enough to lick.” enade one another.

Between the two, for all our garden rewards and glories, gardening is not enjoyable when just dragging a hose wrings out buckets of perspiration, and standing still invites hordes of mosquitoes.



FELDER RUSHING

There’s no good escape spate of 85 degrees was a for these, so we need simply “killer heat wave.” workarounds. Especially Don’t get me wrong, I we older gardeners who love spending quality time remember suffering from in my overstuffed Jackson tossing and turning under cottage garden; but because an attic fan drawing cloying I travel for work, often gone clouds of gardenia fragrance over us all night. time, I’ve spent two decades One way to give misery redesigning and planting the slip is by digging, planting my landscape to all but take ing, watering, weeding, and care of itself. And to be honother necessary chores early est, I’m not really a nurturing kind of gardener.

Me, I cheat. For the past dozen or so summers I’ve managed to slip away, hiding out in a small terrace herb garden in northern England where people freak out when it gets hot; one newspaper warned that a



FELDER’S LOW CARE GARDEN IS READY FOR SUMMER

So when it comes to getting plants to grow well with less care, there are only a few things all old-hand gardeners agree on. Sun or shade is a big consideration, but long-term success with even the most durable yard

plants depends mostly on two factors: choosing sturdy, adapted plants to begin with, and planting them in a way that trains their roots to grow deep and strong so they can support top-growth with little or no extra help.

A big ego-deflating step for me was replacing favorite, alluring but borderline beauties with more durable plants. While I love finding and trying new things, lately I’ve started to hold back, and watching how untested newbies fare in the gardens of better gardeners before adding them to my own.

Now my garden’s backbone plants are the dependable mainstays we see in low maintenance older neighborhoods, rural or cottage gardens, and even in cemeteries. Some are pooh-pooed as old fashioned by opinionated fashionistas, others may be a bit invasive or have relatively minor pest problems. But, due to both nostalgia and endurance, many tried and true older plants are making come-backs in Southern gardens.

By the way I have an updated list of these durable

heat- and drought-tolerant summer performers; shoot me an email via my blog and I’ll send it to you.

Still, no matter how dependable a plant may be, it will be doomed if the soil is over-prepared, over-watered, and over-fertilized; all three cause root problems that weaken even very hardy plants that don’t require it. So for decades now I’ve made it my habit to dig wide holes or beds, adding only a little organic matter to the native dirt so roots get used to growing into what’s outside the holes. I then cover the ground with leaf or bark mulch to keep it cool and moist, and water deeply but not often. This up-front preparation and “lean and mean” maintenance actually work better than constant coddling.

I think gardens should work for us, not make us work for them. Care to join me?

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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