

Synthetic. Bogus. Fake.

I have a suggestion of a type of plant most likely to hold up in our gardens this time of year. Heads up: You might be dismayed.

Keep in mind that I just returned from my second home in northern England, during which I reported on the brand-new Royal Horticultural Society garden named Bridgenorth, and wandered through countless villages and home gardens chock full of plants that love their cool climate.

The small, neatly edged lawns, lush flower beds, jumbles of strongly contrasting shrubs, hanging baskets and other containers are notably stunning, for a couple of reasons.

One, British gardeners stick with what they know does well in England. Their botanic gardens are proving grounds, flower shows get the message out, and garden centers have full-blown display gardens demonstrating how to use them. In short, they focus on finding out, then doing, what makes sense in their climate.

They can't fathom why we try doggedly try to force aluring but difficult Floridian, Midwestern, or British plants to perform well in Mississippi.

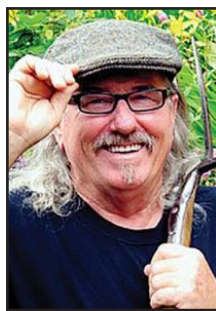
This doesn't mean their

roses and hydrangeas don't have leaf spots, or their weeds are any easier to deal with. They are just less likely to "get their knickers in a twist" over cosmetic issues.

And if something doesn't do well at all, they simply replace it and move on, as they have done for centuries. If a tree dies, they plant vines on it or push the stump over to create a little naturalistic focal point. And yes, they distract from less-than-perfection by over-accessorizing with gnomes.

Anyway, when I got back to Jackson it took just half an hour to remember what I've been missing. First clue was, stepping off the plane, being slapped in the face by hot, wet air. By the time I trudged up my garden path and noticed the faded magnolia on my year-old state flag hanging listlessly in the heavy evening air, I was flagging, too.

But nearly all my shrubs, flowers, and even potted plants have done just fine, because over the years I have settled on those that can take months of abject neglect. My overstuffed cottage garden never gets watered or sprayed, and needs very little pruning, because my life's too short to fool with fussy flowers. Those that fail, get composted.



FELDER RUSHING



FAUX FLOWERS IN ENGLAND

So, after half a century of professional ornamental horticulture, I embrace native, heirloom, and tried-and-true new plants, and including whatever newbies MSU's Gary Bachman has vetted for us. I have a free list, if you email me for it.

But, in the spirit of full disclosure - and please don't be too judgmental, especially if you wear lipstick - a few of my flowers are unnatural. Synthetic, Bogus. Fake. Latin name could be *Plastica silkfolia tackysanthemum*.

You'd actually have to touch some of them to realize

they are shams. But consider how most of us already accept some unnatural garden features, including gnomes, fairies, saints, toadstools, rocks hauled from hundreds of miles away, flower flags, and even little water gardens which are just faux ponds.

Likewise, in very difficult settings, plants that are artificial (from ancient Latin *artificium* meaning "artistry") have their places; besides, modern materials are far more realistic, many even with detailed blemishes, than the old plastic ones.

In a mean prank, I recently



posted an uncaptioned photo on the Mississippi Gardening Facebook site of a fabulous English windowbox overflowing with lush flowers. It got many dozens of likes, oohs, and ahhs, 'til someone noticed that the flowers are silk.

But it certainly showed

that, when needed, even top garden designers know to surrender to practicality.

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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