

FACT SHEET: DROUGHT TOLERANT, HIGH COLOR AND LOW MAINTENANCE...WHAT MORE CAN YOU ASK FOR IN YOUR LANDSCAPE?

LYNN BARBER, B.A.

FLORIDA YARDS & NEIGHBORHOODS AGENT

One of the nine principles of the FYN program is having the right plant in the right place. As in real estate, location, location, location is very important. You need to know several things about the plants you think you want and the location for which they are best suited; such as mature size, light (sun/shade) and water requirements and soil pH .

We are defining high color as flowers that bloom for at least three seasons and/or have flashy and colorful foliage year-round. Low maintenance means the plant is insect and disease resistant, cold tolerant and has minimal maintenance requirements (pruning, fertilizing and pest control). FYI, turfgrass is low color and high maintenance.

Shrubs in the high color, low maintenance and drought tolerant category include: Beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*), Golden Dewdrop (*Duranta repens*) and Firecracker Plant (*Russelia equisetiformis*). Beautyberry has a 4-8 foot spread, moderate growth rate and shiny purple berries with lilac flowers in spring to fall. Golden Dewdrop has a 6-10 foot spread, full sun to partial shade, blooms from spring to fall and attracts butterflies and hummingbirds. Firecracker Plant spread is 6-12 feet, full sun, red flowers all year with varieties available in cream and pink colored flowers.

Perennial plants that reseed themselves include: Tickseed, Florida's State Wildflower (*Coreopsis*), Flax Lily (*Dianella*) and Whirling Butterfly (*Gaura*). Tickseed has a 1-3 foot spread, medium to full sun, may be annual or short-lived depending on species, and attracts butterflies and birds. Flax Lily has a 1-2 foot spread, full sun to partial shade, blooms year-round. Whirling Butterfly has a 2-3 foot spread, full sun to partial shade, pink/white flowers in spring to fall.

Ground covers that meet our three criteria above include: Beach Sunflower (*Helianthus debilis*), Purple Queen (*Setcreasea purpurea*) and Lantana (*Lantana* spp.) Beach Sunflower has a 2-4 foot spread, full sun, fast grower, year-round bloomer and re-seeder. Purple Queen has a 1-2 foot spread, full sun to partial shade, salt tolerant, little pink flowers year round, deep purple foliage as the name implies. Lantana can be considered a shrub or ground cover, some types are invasive, full sun, blooms year-round, salt tolerant, attracts butterflies, grows well in containers, many colors available.

Some key tips to low maintenance gardening are: hydrozone your plants, group them by watering needs, use 2-3 inches of mulch for weed suppression, moisture retention, and to regulate soil temperature and because it's prettier than sand. Water newly planted plants regularly until a good root system is established. And, be sure you know the watering restrictions for your area. Use time release vs. water based fertilizers because water based will leach through the soil on the first rain or irrigation cycle.

These are just a few drought tolerant, high color and low maintenance plants that will put a smile on your face and make your neighbors envious. For additional information on choosing drought tolerant plants, go to: http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/lawn_and_garden/getting_started/choosing_plants.html

For assistance with horticultural questions, call the Master Gardener Help Desk at the Hillsborough County Extension Service, located in Seffner: 813 744-5519 X7. More gardening information is available at <http://hillsborough.extension.ufl.edu> and <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.