

DIG THIS by Peg Tillery 7-26-07 (Great Plants for Summer Gardens) © 2006

Today's column is about some plants you might want to add to your own gardens. The first plant on the list is a hardy gardenia by Monrovia called *Gardenia jasminoides* 'Kleims Hardy.' I found mine at Savage Plants in Kingston. This cream-flowered plant smells delightfully spicy and fragrant. It has shiny evergreen foliage and promises to grow to about two feet tall by three feet around. It will survive our wet winters and cooler temperatures.

Each year new northwest gardeners who have moved here from the Carolinas and further south ask how to grow gardenias here. I've had to disappoint these new northwest gardeners. Now if you've always wanted to have gardenias outdoors this may be the plant for you. This hardy gardenia will also live well in a container outdoors. I've planted mine in a newly developing perennial bed. I'll let readers know how it's doing through the winter.

This is the time of year to haunt your favorite nursery for hydrangeas, ornamental grasses, crocosmia, Echinacea, rudbekia and other summer flowering plants. Everyone has a favorite method of selecting the plants for their garden, but I prefer to purchase plants when they're in bloom. That way I know they've already bloomed once and I can also see the actual bloom colors. Some flowering shrubs need a few years before they burst into bloom, this way I don't have to wait.

In addition to haunting local nurseries I've also been finding great perennial plants at our local farmers markets. I purchased a yellow Echinacea last Saturday at the Poulsbo Farmers Market. The week before that I purchased a tangerine orange Echinacea from Savage Plants Nursery in Kingston and both plants are grouped with a nearly red Echinacea purchased last year.

Dahlias come in all sizes, shapes and colors. You'll find those too at local nurseries and farmers markets. Dahlias keep blooming until we have the first frost in October or November. About the only downside I can find to these delightful flowers is the slug problem. Slugs seem to love the foliage and sometimes they'll even chew up the newest blossoms when they're still budding out. This can be remedied by ringing the plants with iron phosphate (one of the brands is Sluggo). This product is sometimes a bit pricey but a little goes a long way.

Herbs are also perfect to find and plant up this time of year. Many of the softer, leafier herbs may not be available, but you'll definitely find lavender, rosemary, savory and other bushier, woodier herbs ready to plant into your gardens. Herbs grow happily for many years in containers.

It's a great time to check out all the ornamental grasses. Grasses are in their glory these summer days. You'll have a good idea of how they'll look next year and also where you can plant them in your garden this year.

Remember, that even though these summer plants are tolerant of our dry, hot weather, they will need regular watering their first (and sometimes second) year until well-established.

What are you waiting for? Call up a friend, head out to your favorite nursery or farmers market and pick up some plants to brighten up your garden. Good friends and fun plants are one of summer's treasures and pleasures.

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