

DIG THIS by Peg Tillery (for 7-02-08) Red, White and Blue Flowers © 2008

July is when we celebrate the birth of our country. How about some red, white and blue flowers to brighten up our gardens and celebrate Independence Day? It's also a fun time to haunt our local nurseries in search of plants and inspiration.

The color red has many meanings. We are most familiar with red symbolizing love, power and anger, but it is also a color for good luck, pay attention and in some cultures it means purity, joy and celebration.

White is symbolic of purity, unity, loyalty and sincerity. Blue is the color for the Virgin Mary in Catholicism and it is also used for symbolic meaning in other religions. Darkest blue is used for royalty and we all remember the navy blue power suits. But blue can also mean faithfulness, loyalty and trust. Blue is also a calm and serene color.

For white look for Echinacea, daisies, carnations, gladiolas, and white roses. You may also be able to still locate white fuchsias, either annuals or hardy fuchsias. White roses come in every size, from tiny miniature roses to climbing varieties. Flower carpet roses and shrub roses will fit well in containers for several seasons. Don't forget the old standbys, geraniums and begonias for sparkling summer splendor of bright white, offset with dark green leaves. For foliage try many of the hosta varieties with splashes of white in a multitude of patterns. Dusty miller and artemesias have silver foliage that can serve well in a red, white and blue combo.

Red plants abound this time of year. Besides red carnations, gladiolas geraniums, begonias and roses, look for Gaillardia (blanket flower). Try to locate a variety called Gaillardia x grandiflora 'Burgundy' with deepest red hues on its petals. Lobelia cardinalis not only has dark crimson flowers, the foliage is also burgundy. Try to locate Mondarda 'Cambridge Scarlet' or 'Colrain Red.' Monarda is also known as bergamot or bee balm. You may still be able to locate a few late blooming peonies, and once again, fuchsias can fill the bill. For foliage, look for some of the new red and burgundy flax varieties. You may even be able to find a few hebes with scarlet blossoms and/or scarlet undersides to their leaves.

Last but not least, add a few splashes of blue to these patriotic themed plantings. Blue flowers are often hard to find, but every nursery should have a few blue plants to choose from. Blue is a color most gardeners lust after at least once in their lives. You might be lucky enough to locate blue Meconopsis Himalayan poppies. Easier to locate is Plumbago, a delightful evergreen shrub with intense blue flowers. You'll find several varieties from small and miniature to three feet tall. Since summer seemed to take forever you may find a few Japanese iris still available in hues of blue. For a ground cover or to trail and spill over the edges of containers, look for blue star creeper, Isotoma fluviatilis. Don't forget wonderful blue hydrangeas either.

Remember too, there are other ways to add splashes of red, white and blue to a garden. Why not paint a trellis or birdhouse in a shade of blue or red to add some splash? For sure you'll be able to tuck a container here or there in shades of red or blue. Or just sprinkle some red, white and blue bits of decorative tumbled glass along a path.