

Heat-Beaters

Hot, hotter, and hottest seems to be a weather forecast we are becoming accustomed to. Rather than give up in the face of heat and drought, we can shift our attention to the tough plants that survive. One factor to consider is summer dormancy. For example, if you grew spring bulbs in pots, those pots can be parked and ignored as the bulbs are dormant. Even lilies, although not dormant, can be ruined if you plant something over them that has to be watered continually.

Other plants that go dormant are the native spring ephemerals like mayapples. Native perennials tolerate heat and drought without sulking. Butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), bloodroot (*Sanguinaria*), wild indigo (*Baptisia*), bluestar (*Amsonia*), stoksia, rudbeckia are some plants that can form a beautiful backbone for your flowerbeds without the endless lugging of hoses and watering cans as well as the strain on well or water bill.

Grasses are great! First year plantings require that inch of water a week to strengthen their roots but once the roots are down deep, they are set. Little bluestem stays straight and silvery and miscanthus 'Morning Light' as well as other cultivars, moves gracefully in the slightest breeze giving the garden a cooling effect.

Yucca is a dependable plant. After several years you may notice that it is not exactly where you planted it as new plants have spread from the original rosette. The tall panicles of bell shaped flowers are arresting but the sword-shaped leaves add interest to a border year round. Yucca filamentosa, know as Adam's needle, can be found with either a center streak of gold on the leaves or with leaves edged in cream or gold.

There are several native shrubs that tolerate our heat and drought with better grace than do those plants introduced from different climates. The native holly is indestructible and myrtles do well. Wax myrtle, bayberry, has a weeping form that does well in dry shade. I have volunteer sumacs that flourish when all about them sag. The inkberry hollies that I lopped off to about 18 inches from the ground have forgiven the insult and put out new growth. Since we live here through a hot summer, it is a cooling thought to realize we have plants that can weather the weather as well as we do.

More than food and medicine

Curious, the way plants have influenced history. Once upon a time the British Empire circled the globe and wherever the British landed, gardens followed. When the Empire's influence in Africa stretched from the Nile to the Cape of Good Hope, botanical gardens were established in Durban, S. Africa and Nairobi, Kenya.

In the 18th century sugar was a more commercially important crop than tobacco so when, after seven years of war, the British defeated the French, France chose to part with Canada rather than the sugar isles of Martinique and Guadeloupe. The poppy, too, had a role in

the success of the Empire. The British sold opium to China by force but first they bought the opium in what is now Turkey but they realized that if they grew it in India the sea journey would be months shorter.

The less morally conflicted tea trade helped build the Empire. Being expert botanists, the British scouted out exceptionally fine tea plants along the India-Burma borderlands and when planted in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) the ensuing tea plantations shouldered the Chinese from the market.

The commercial rubber tree, *Hevea brasiliensis*, may have been native to South America but over centuries most plantations have shifted to Asia. When it was still a major crop in Brazil, British botanists pocketed seeds back to England. They sprouted first in Kew Gardens then were taken to the botanical garden in Singapore.

The sap of the *Hevea* was known to the Aztecs long before Columbus sailed but the first Europeans to write about it were French explorers who sent samples to Europe in 1736. Uses were gradually developed in France but it was the British who made the sticky stuff practical. In 1820 Thomas Hancock found a way to make larger sheets of rubber and a Scot inventor, Charles Macintosh put that rubber between two layers of wool and the Brit's beloved 'mac' was born.