Outstanding Perennials for SA Landscapes

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Perennials are plants for the landscape that live more than one year. Most of the perennials that we rate as desirable offer color for the landscape. The advantage of decorating your landscape with perennials is that they are relatively permanent and they are generally easier to care for and use less water than annuals.

Fanick’s phlox is prominent at area nurseries. In a 1 gallon container and in your raised bed garden it will grow to about 3 feet tall and 3 ft. around. Topping off the shiny leafed foliage are clumps of pink blossoms with darker pink etchings. They are blooming now in gardens and at area nurseries and there will be a second bloom period in the autumn. The blooms are attractive to view but the most distinctive thing about Fanick’s phlox is the fragrance of the blooms. They remind me of the fragrance of lilacs. Grow Fanick’s phlox in raised beds in full sun. In my experience it is the easiest of the phlox to grow in our area. Butterflies utilize Fanick’s phlox as a nectar source and, unfortunately, deer will eat the flowers and foliage.

If you attended the Festival of Flowers this year you had the opportunity to see the daylily show. Seeing the daylilies on display and also viewing Master Gardener Dorothy Wiede’s daylily collection reminded me that gardeners in the San Antonio area should use more daylilies. I was less impressed with the modern small selections like than I was the 3 feet tall varieties such as Tawny, Ono, and Fairy Tail Pink. Daylilies qualify as Xeriscape plants and make an excellent groundcover after their summer bloom show. The upright foliage is lush and attractive in its own right. Grow daylilies in well-drained soil such as a raised bed or garden enriched with compost. The attractive appearance of the foliage apparently is matched by an attractive taste. Keep deer away from the plants with a strong fence and use slug and snail bait to protect to foliage from those pests.

Shrimp plant is available with a rust colored or golden plume-shaped bloom that is showy all growing season long. They are disciplined growers to 2 feet tall in sun or partial shade. In my neighborhood deer will eat shrimp plant in a drought but it is not a favorite browse. Hummingbirds, however are very fond of the plant as a nectar source. Because of its disciplined growth habit, shrimp plant is effective when used as a border of massed plants or a row of single plants.

If you are looking for a deer proof perennial, consider bearded iris. The elaborate but tough orchid- like blooms are borne on stalks above the sword-like foliage. Cemetery and blue flag iris bloom white and blue respectively beginning in February to be followed by the larger German(Dutch) iris that bloom in April and May. German iris flowers are available in many colors including yellow, purple, white, blue, and bicolor. Plant the rhizomes level with the soil surface. Iris are very drought tolerant and are not fussy about the soil as long as it does not stay soggy. Grow iris in full sun.

Canna is an upright growing rhizome that will grow in soggy or dry situations. They do well in a xeriscape landscape. One of the most useful varieties, Pfizer Dwarf is available in red, yellow, pink, orange and salmon. It grows to about 3 feet tall. Other selections can be 5- 6 ft. tall. Canna have a tropical look with banana like foliage. The major issue with canna is the leaf rolling and eating caused by the Brazilian Skipper caterpillar. The caterpillars can be controlled with a systemic like acephate or if you prefer the butterflies, plant the canna in the back of the landscape where you can see the bright flowers without seeing the ragged leaves.