**Weekly Express-News Article**

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**“Beware of these Beauties”**

Not all plants that produce blooms all summer are necessarily a desirable addition to your garden. Consider the “other” characteristics of some of the summer blooming plants that are showing their color right now before you plant them.

Four-o-clocks are a pest or a valuable landscape addition depending on your outlook. The pest label comes because they are almost invincible once they become established in a landscape. They reproduce by rhizomes and seed so you can expect to have them appear as unplanted invaders through the landscape.

On the other hand, four-o-clocks produce silver dollar size blooms in yellow, white, pink, and bi-colors throughout the summer. Some of the blooms even have a pleasant fragrance.

The four-o-clocks invincibility is possible because of the plants drought tolerance abilities. Large storage structures on the root systems make them capable of surviving all summer without irrigation.

Four-o-clocks can grow in full sun or shade and do not seem to be eaten by deer. Butterflies and hummingbirds favor four-o-clocks as a nectar source.

Four-o-clocks grow very fast and the plant is not as disciplined (compact and predictable) as many gardeners prefer but it can be controlled by pruning.

As long as we are exploring plants that bloom all summer but are considered pests by some gardeners, we should discuss coral vine. It is also called “queen’s crown”. Its claim to fame is the pink bloom that covers the vine all summer. It can be truly spectacular as it grows on a trellis, over a dilapidated shed, up into your trees, and eventually over everything in its path! Coral vine is an aggressive grower and spreads from its roots.

The only thing that saves us from being overwhelmed by coral vine is that it is very cold sensitive. The minute we start receiving 40º F temperatures it stops growing and blooming. Somewhere near 35º F the leaves and stems die.

Try coral vine and four-o-clocks if you are prepared to keep them under control.

If you visit the Dreamhill neighborhood over by Medical Center, at most times of the year the things you notice are the large lots and the deer. There are lots of deer. If however, you visit after a mid-summer rain you will experience the cat’s claw (macfadyena unguis-cati) in full bloom.

The show is spectacular because cat’s claw vines grow everywhere, over fences, up trees, and across the ground. The vines are covered with one-and-a-half inch waxy yellow, tubular flowers. As showy as the bloom periods are, the question of the desirability of cat’s claw is still being debated. The plant is very aggressive.

The nursery trade has made its decision; they have re-named the Jeckle and Hyde plant as “yellow trumpet creeper” to make a name more palatable to consumers.

Being one of those homeowners “blessed” with cat’s claw, however, as much as I like the flowers, I find the aggressive vine to be a pest worthy of all out war with Round-up, Remedy, and whatever other tools that are available.

Cat’s claw seeks sun but it can grow along the ground or under the ground in the shade long distances to find a new fence, shrub, tree or building to climb to reach the sun. It uses its sharp claws to cling tenaciously to wood, masonry or metal.

I would recommend that, rather than growing it yourself, you rely on a visit to Dreamhill Estates when the cat’s claw is in bloom.

Mexican petunia is a perennial that blooms over a long period in the summer. It grows to three feet tall and produces its flowers along, and at the top of its leggy stem. The tubular flowers are violet. They are favorites of hummingbirds and butterflies. Unfortunately, Mexican petunia is a master at spreading. Seeds are produced quickly and spread widely. Expect your initial planting to double or triple each year as the seeds blow in the wind. Your neighbors will probably not thank you for being the source of this drought tolerant, deer proof perennial even though the flowers are attractive.

In avoiding the full size Mexican petunia, do not pass up its cousin the dwarf Mexican petunia. We often call it dwarf ruellia to differentiate it from it invasive relative. Dwarf ruellia is a good drought tolerant groundcover for sun or shade that is a steady producer of summer blooms. Select “Katy” for violet flowers and “Bonita” for pink flowers.

Dwarf Mexican petunia only spreads enough to fill a bed with one-foot tall, lush, dark green evergreen plants.

Gaura has small honeysuckle like blooms on sparsely leafed stems that grow two to four feet tall depending on the soil and the variety. The plants are pest free and very drought tolerant. They also produce their crop of small pink, lavender or white flowers all summer, much to the delight of hummingbirds and butterflies.

Unfortunately, gaura is a reseeding machine. Plant it only if you are willing to have it spread like a weed!