**Primetime**

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**“Beautiful Problems”**

Bamboo is the first plant that gardeners think of when we consider plants that can become a major pest in our landscape. We also think of several varieties of trees that become problems but we usually do not identify summer blooming plants as problems. Here are some for you to consider. All have attractive blooms in the summer but the blooms may not be worth the aggravation. You decide!

Mexican petunia is a perennial that blooms over a long period in the summer. It grows to three feet tall and produces 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!

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.