**Weekly Express-News Article**

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**“Perennials for San Antonio Landscapes”**

Perennials are herbaceous plants that return each year. Herbaceous means that they don’t have woody stems. Most of those we value for our landscapes bloom and freeze back to the ground each year.

Texas gold columbines are blooming now in area landscapes. They do most of their growing in the fall, winter, and spring. Summer is their rest period. Texas gold columbines are desirable plants for San Antonio landscapes for several reasons. The yellow blooms resemble “shooting stars” as they emerge from the foliage on stalks that reach three feet tall. The foliage is an attractive soft green that reminds me of maidenhair fern. Thirdly, Texas gold columbine is shade tolerant. It grows best under deciduous trees or even sparsely foliated live oaks.

This exceptional plant is described as a weak perennial because the individual plants are short lived. To make up for it Texas gold columbine reseeds itself. To take advantage of reseeding, avoid mulching around Texas gold columbines.

Fanick’s phlox has pink and white blooms that are arranged on clusters above the light green foliage. The plant rambles a bit rather than growing upright. Fanick’s phlox is desirable because it seems to be our toughest phlox and can survive many years on good sites, but it is exceptional because of the fragrance of the flowers. If you miss lilac fragrance, this plant is as close as we are going to get in capturing it. The flowers also last a long time as a cut flower. A small bouquet can perfume the whole house. Grow Fanick’s phlox in a raised bed in morning or full sun.

Dutch iris are blooming now in many different colors including white, lavender, yellow, purple, pink, and bicolor. Some of the selections have pleasant fragrances and all are tough and showy.

Plant Dutch (also called German or bearded iris) as rhizomes in full sun. The top of the rhizome should be level with the surface of the ground. Iris do better without mulch because it contributes to rhizome rot during wet periods. In addition to the flowers, iris foliage is distinctive and the plants make a good tall groundcover. In my neighborhood, deer do not eat iris blooms or foliage, which makes them especially desirable for hot sunny beds in native soil along the road.

Lantanas are nearly as tough as iris’ and are also deer resistant. The most popular lantana is the “new gold hybrid” that is an aggressive prostrate plant that grows in native soils and produces gold blooms in full sun. It is sometimes attacked by lace bugs that make the leaves look dusty and ends blooming for six to eight weeks. Lace bugs can be controlled with acephate.

The lavender prostrate lantana is not as aggressive as “new gold”, but it does not seem to be bothered by lace bugs. It is more likely to bloom in spring and fall than in the middle of the summer. It will bloom in the winter if the weather stays mild and even has some shade tolerance. There is a white version of the lavender lantana that is less aggressive. Both the lavender and white lantanas do well in hanging baskets.

Upright lantanas are also available in lemon yellow, reds, oranges, pinks, and cream. Most have bicolor flowers and some can grow to shrub size.

Shasta daisy is another spring and early summer blooming favorite. The clumps are very decorative in bloom. Shasta’s are one of the weak perennials. A portion of the clumps in a garden will decline and die in any year. To counteract this phenomena the clumps should be divided every two or three years to form three or four new plants. Grow Shasta daisies in full or morning sun.

For the deer proof garden, consider thryallis. It will grow to six feet on good soil if it does not freeze back, but usually grows to three feet tall. It has small yellow blooms on an airy upright plant. Thryallis is very drought tolerant. Grow it in full sun as a specimen or in a cluster of three to five plants. It will bloom all summer to the delight of the butterflies without attracting the interest of the deer.

Daylilies bloom in the early summer and depending on the selection maybe in the fall again. The lush foliage makes a good summer groundcover for full sun in addition to serving as background for the many versions of orange, golden, and yellow blooms. The tall orange version readily naturalizes, but there are many small (12 inch) or medium (2 feet) size selections that are very disciplined growers.

Grow daylilies in full sun. Deer love daylily foliage and blooms so they are not an option in a neighborhood blessed by the pests.

German carnation is a perennial that produces blood red blooms. The blooms resemble the florist shop blooms in miniature. I have had best luck growing this perennial in morning sun, in a raised bed. To maintain a bed I had to treat them as other weak perennials and divide the clumps every few years. German carnations have existed in New Braunfels gardens for the entire history of the City.