

Late Summer Flowers

With late summer upon us, one question that I sometimes am asked is what flowers can be used to dress up the yard in late summer. There are actually many that will do the job. Although not completely hardy in many of Utah's colder mountain valleys, rose of Sharon is a shrub that will bloom from mid-summer almost until first frost. Its flowers are very showy and look similar to the hibiscus flowers seen in Hawaiian leis (the two plants are actually closely related). Strategies to maximize its survival include not planting in the coldest areas of the yard, usually at the bottom of hills and in other exposed areas. Rose of Sharon thrives in full sun otherwise. There are dozens of varieties available.

Another close relative of rose of Sharon is a perennial that is cut back to the ground in the fall often times called hardy hibiscus, perennial hibiscus or the "dinner plate flower." It has also recently begun blooming. Its flowers are often time 6-8 inches across and vary in color from white to lavender and red. Plants can sometimes reach 4-5 feet high and wide over a number of years. Hardy hibiscus also requires protection in the colder mountain valleys but will generally over winter if 6 inches of mulch or leaves are placed over the dormant plant after it has died back in the fall. Remove the mulch after danger of frost in the spring. Perennial hibiscus is usually the last plant to wake up in the spring. Do not think it is dead when the rest of the yard is actively growing. There are several great varieties of hardy hibiscus, including Southern Belle, Disco Belle, Fireball, Lady and Lord Baltimore and Kopper King.

A Utah native plant that offers excellent summer and fall color is called fire chalice or *Zauschneria*. It naturally grows in canyons in rocky areas, and flower color varies from orange to red. It flowers very profusely, but also requires well drained soil. However it survives as long as it is not over-watered. Fire chalice grows to 2 feet tall and 3-4 feet wide and requires some room. It works well as a larger border plant and in combination with taller perennials.

Another perennial that has a unique name, *gaura* or whirling butterflies, also blooms very profusely the entire summer. It also reaches 3-4 feet high and wide but is worth using. Flower color varies from white to dark red and the texture of the plant fits very well in naturalized or less formal landscapes where its flowers have a "spray effect". *Gaura* is very drought tolerant and its size can be somewhat controlled by not overwatering it.

Other plants that offer nice late summer color include butterfly bush, coneflowers, black-eyed Susans, tickseed (sometimes called *coreopsis*), anise hyssop (sometimes called *agastache*) and some varieties of daylily. All of these plants require full sun to truly thrive. Visit local garden centers and plant retailers if you wish to find these plants.

We are also beginning registration for the 2009 Master Gardener classes. They will begin in mid-January. Registration will cost \$95, the same as last year, and will be on a first come, first served basis. The course will last 12-14 weeks. Interest is high this year. For further information, call 752-6263.