

August 2009

Plants of the Month

Buttonbush

Cephalanthus occidentalis

Want to wow your friends and neighbors with an interesting native plant? Buttonbush sports a white, globe-shaped flower resembling something from outer space. One of the few summer blooming shrubs, buttonbush has long-lasting flowers which form a round seedhead in fall. This deciduous shrub grows to ten, even fifteen, feet in height and is found in wet soils near swamps, ponds and lakes. It has outstanding wildlife value with many bird species feeding on the seedhead. The highly glossy leaves grow on loose open branches. Buttonbush is ideal for a rain garden in sun to part sun.



Thornless Blackberries

Rubus spp.

Now that you can grow blackberries without thorns, nothing should stop you. For modest time and money, plants produce large sweet berries for many years. Select an erect or trailing variety from our fact sheet, "Getting Started with Small Fruits." Plant in spring or one month before the last fall frost. Provide full sun and fertile soil with a pH of 6.2-6.8. Multiple canes arise from the crown of trailing varieties, sprawling 10 feet or more. Support them with a trellis of two posts and two horizontal wires. Canes produce berries their second year, then die. In spring, prune out old dead canes, keeping the green one-year-old canes.



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Tomatillo

Physalis philadelphica

The principle ingredient in salsa verde and other Mexican dishes, tomatillos grow as a green or purple 1-3" fruit hanging inside a papery lantern-like green husk. Related to the tomato, tomatillo has similar culture but is easier, with fewer diseases and pests, except flea beetle which doesn't seem to slow fruit production. Direct-seed or start indoors. Plant more than one for cross fertilization. Plant transplants deep. Fairly drought tolerant, these shrubby plants stay under 2 feet but can sprawl out 4 feet. When ripe, the sticky fruit softens and fills out or splits through the husk. Pick tomatillos before they turn yellow.



Hardy Water Lily

Nymphaea 'Joanna Pring'

Stars of the water garden, hardy water lilies offer pleasure throughout the growing season. Large flowered varieties look beautiful in backyard ponds, while small flowered types such as 'Joanna Pring' are perfect for tub gardens. Colors include pink, white, yellow, and red. Lily pads benefit your pond, stabilizing water temperature and shading out the dreaded algae. In spring, place your water lily about 6-12 inches below the water surface. Flowering is best in full sun. Heavy feeders, they benefit from regular fertilization. Remove yellow foliage and spent flowers. In fall, place in the deepest part of your pond or move to a garage with temperatures around 40 degrees.

