

February 2008

Plant Picks of the Month

Prickly Pear cactus
Opuntia humifusa

Tired of watering? Have a baking hot spot in the yard? Want a smile on a winter day? Try a winter-hardy prickly pear cactus. The smooth pads of these native cacti have the typical cactus spines as well as glochids, tiny barbed hairs with a deceptively downy appearance. Practical, yet novel, prickly pears are well suited for dry, sandy areas and rocky sites. The showy yellow flowers open 3-4 inches wide. Fig-like fruit, called tunas, taste similar to watermelon. Besides full sun, cacti insist on well-drained soils to grow successfully. Hardy to zone 5.



Camellia 'Lady Clare'

Flowers in the snow? Yes! Camellias add an element of surprise to the winter garden with colorful blossoms in hues ranging from light pink to crimson and white. These large, attractive shrubs have lustrous, dark, evergreen leaves and a pyramid shape. Camellias are cold hardy when sited in a protected location, on the north side of the house. Some begin flowering in fall while others wait until winter. 'Lady Clare' blooms mid-late season with large dark pink flowers and offers above-average cold hardiness. These shrubs are happiest when planted in moist, well-drained acidic soil amended with organic matter.



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Christmas Fern
Polystichum acrostichoides

Christmas ferns stay glossy evergreen when most ferns are dormant. Stiff new fronds grow upright and remain effective even when hard frost or heavy snow pushes them over. With their creeping rhizomes, they can be a slow spreading groundcover or used as clumps about 1-2 feet tall. These Maryland natives mingle well with bulbs and ferns in woodlands, on streambanks, or in perennial borders. They like moist, acidic, humusy forest soils, so work organic matter into their planting bed. They tolerate sun as long as soil is moist and endure dry soils in shade. Divide clumps in spring or fall.



Harry Lauder's Walkingstick
Corylus avellana 'Contorta'

This shrub is all about winter interest. When leaves drop in autumn, all the better to enjoy its wildly contorted stems. By late winter, hanging catkins decorate the branches, too. Harry Lauder's Walkingstick grows into a large shrub, 8 to 10 feet tall. Foliage is somewhat contorted but not showy. Plant in full sun or light shade. To best show off its contortions, locate in front of a solid backdrop such as evergreens or a structure. Try to purchase a plant grown on its own rootstock; grafted plants tend to send up suckers that are a nuisance to prune off.



Have a pest or gardening question?

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