

June 2008

Plant Picks of the Month

Rhubarb

Rheum acuminatum

Tucked into a flower or vegetable bed, rhubarb can pass for a big-leaved hosta relative and be handy for harvesting its delicious sour stems. Rhubarb wants full sun to light shade--not too hot. Given moisture, established plants tolerate drought, but 'wet feet' cause root rot. Plant in rich soil. It produces for many years, so amend heavily with manure or compost before planting. Plant crown divisions in early spring, allowing 4 x 4 feet each. Wait a year before harvesting and always remove flower heads that divert its energy. After tops die in fall, mulch with more compost.



Pulmonaria 'Highdown'

Pulmonaria saccharata 'Highdown'

Polka dots in the garden are rare and fun. Pulmonaria is one of the few plants that have them. Known through the ages as lungwort, pulmonaria grows in clumps from a few inches tall to a hosta-like 18" by 24" wide. The variety 'Highdown' reaches 15 inches and sports white spots on its leaves. Other pulmonaria varieties offer silver spots, blotches, or a silvery cast on leaves; some are hairy. Nodding blooms of pink to purple/blue arrive in early spring. Plant pulmonaria in groups in semi- to full shade where they don't get too dry in the summer.



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Japanese Stewartia

Stewartia pseudocamellia

Japanese stewartia is a wonderful tree anywhere, but a special find for small city gardens or accent plantings near patio, window or walk. Stewartia provides seasonal interest all year. Camellia-like white flowers with orange anthers appear in June or July when few trees are flowering. Red and orange leaves brighten the fall and. As they age, mottled exfoliating bark adds winter interest. Japanese stewartia grow slowly to about 20 feet. They prefer sun but will tolerate a little afternoon shade. Soil should be moist but well drained and acidic. It is best to keep it watered through a drought.



Lizard's Tail

Saururus cernuus

Ponds and bogs are the natural home of this native plant. Heart-shaped leaves lead to 4 to 6 inch flower spires that last almost the entire summer. The fragrant blooms rise up then curve, suggesting a tail. Rising to a total height of 1 ½ to 4 ½ feet, Lizard's tail plant enjoys sun but will flower even in full shade. They produce a seed capsule eaten by wild fowl. A vigorous grower, Lizard's tail can be grown in a container in ponds, with top soil level at a water depth of 0 to 6". Divide clumps in spring when necessary.



Have a pest or gardening question?

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