

May 2009

Plants of the Month

Sunflowers

Helianthus

Stars in the edible landscape, the huge blooms of annual sunflowers produce seeds packed with nutrition. Iron content is second only to egg yolks and liver. Seeds from purely decorative sunflower varieties usually make seeds suitable for birds and wildlife, but for human consumption, raise an edible variety such as Mammoth. Reaching 6 feet with a heavy seed head, Mammoth benefits from staking and a booster fertilization when blooms appear. Harvest when the back turns yellow to yellow-green and bracts turn brown. Cut, leaving 1 foot of the stalk attached, and hang in a warm dry place until dry.



Fringetree, Old-man's-beard

Chionanthus virginicus

Want a head turning plant? Beautiful and native? Look no further than fringetree. The white panicles of this 12 to 20 foot small tree/ large shrub give it a unique shaggy look. The clean leaves, up to 8" long, stay attractive all summer. Usually disease and pest free, it handles a range of soils though, of course, it prefers fertile deep moist soil. It likes Maryland's natural acidity. Found along streams or swamps, fringetree prefers full sun but will take some shade. Attractive as a specimen plant or in groupings, fringetree also tolerates air pollution well.



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Golden Club

Orontium aquaticum

This wetland or pond plant, with its uniquely shaped flower, is a native of Eastern North America. The deep green 6-8" leaves stay about a foot tall. From spring to early summer, flower spikes arise from the clumps. Actually it is the tips of the slightly curving white spikes that hold the tiny golden flowers. Plant golden club in pots in ponds or bogs in water up to 5 inches deep. Tolerates partial shade. Plants spread by rhizomes and can be divided in spring. The blue-green berries are poisonous, but can be sown under 1" of water in fall.



Japanese Hydrangea Vine

Schizophragma hydrangeoides

Patience pays off when you plant this spectacular Asian vine. In early summer, its paddle-shaped pure white sepals surround tiny true flowers in showy 8-10" clusters similar to a lacecap hydrangea. Growing slowly up to 30 feet high and 6-9 feet wide, it attaches to vertical surfaces such as brick walls or lattice by adhesive rootlets. The toothed heart-shaped leaves stay clean and pest free throughout the summer. In autumn, they turn yellow and fall, revealing the reddish brown woody stems. These provide some interest over the winter. Plant in rich, moderately moist soil in full to part shade.

