



October 2010

## Plants of the Month

### **Rose-of-Sharon 'Helene'**

*Hibiscus syriacus* 'Helene'

Though you don't think of rose-of-Sharon as a fall bloomer, this champ of the summer garden blooms its head off well into autumn. 'Helene' is one of four triploids named for Greek goddesses developed by the U.S. National Arboretum. These varieties are virtually sterile, unlike the old rose-of-Sharons whose unwanted volunteers always made them such a nuisance. The flowers are huge and dramatic compared to the old varieties, too. Not fussy about soils, rose-of-Sharon grows in sun to part shade. 'Helene' reaches 8 to 10 feet in height. Others are of similar size. While no maintenance pruning is necessary, they may be pruned back heavily in early spring. Rose-of-Sharon foliage is shunned by deer.



### **Cattail**

*Typha*

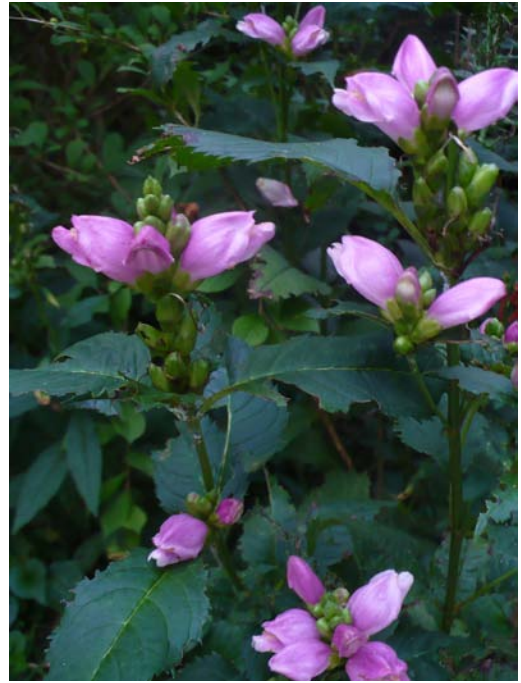
Cattails are as American as apple pie and edible, too. Fond childhood memories include lighting them to make smoky punks, but cattails have been used for everything from baskets to boats by Native Americans and peoples around the globe. The narrow leaves arise from reedy clumps. In late summer, beige flower spikes usually go unnoticed, but by early fall they become the velvety brown seedheads we know so well. Birds nest in the stalks and eat the seed. Wildlife feed on the fleshy rhizomes. Common cattails, *Typha latifolia*, are useful in sunny unmowable ditches or wet areas but too big and aggressive for small ponds. Ornamental ponds can enjoy *Typha angustifolia*, narrow-leaf cattail, which reaches 4 feet, or *Typha minima*, Dwarf cattail which reaches only 12-18".



## **Turtlehead**

*Chelone lyonii*, *Chelone glabra*

Terps fans should like this native plant that blooms during football season in the shape of a turtle's head. White turtlehead *Chelone glabra* is the primary host plant for the endangered Baltimore checkerspot butterfly, a black, gold and white beauty. The leaves provide food for the caterpillar stage. A bit of a misnomer, white turtlehead may also be pink or purple. *Chelone lyonii*, common name pink turtlehead (pictured above) is true to its name however, with pink flowers protruding from stalks with handsome glossy leaves. Turtleheads bloom from July well into fall. They are easy to grow in sun to part shade and moderate to well-moistened soil, though pink turtlehead has been known to put up with a surprising amount of drought. Height is usually between 1 ½ to 3 feet, depending on growing conditions. They spread by rhizomes to make a nice patch.



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## **Flowering Dogwood**

*Cornus florida*

Indulge in a dogwood. Today's Appalachian series of dogwoods are highly disease resistant. Heralds of autumn, dogwoods are the first to adopt plum, rose or salmon hues. Plant your dogwood so you can enjoy seasonal interest up close. In fall red berries are lacquer-shiny and gobbled by birds. When leaves drop, gray "flower buds" have already formed, like tiny flattened turbans, at twig tips. Prized for its early spring flowers (technically bracts) that appear even before leaves, this beloved native tree is also one of the rare woody plants whose blooms appear in horizontal festoons. Keep in mind that dogwoods are forest understory trees, preferring semi-shade and acid woodsy organic soils. Mulch the root area and avoid baking sun.



**Do you have a plant or insect pest question? Call the Home and Garden Information Center 1-800-342-2507**