



September 2010

Plants of the Month

Lamium, Spotted Dead Nettle, 'White Nancy'

Lamium maculatum 'White Nancy'

'White Nancy' sparkles in all-green gardens or shady corners. Ground cover lamiums grow 6-8 inches tall and evergreen. The 'White Nancy' variety has frosty white leaves. Ordinary lamium has only a white or yellow midvein stripe. In spring or early summer, 'White Nancy' sports white flower clusters, while other lamiums are purple-pink. Lamium spreads slowly into a 1-2 foot mat. Average garden soil suits it fine. Generally, lamiums tolerate sun to shade, but 'White Nancy' does best in partial shade. An even soil moisture is crucial, as it does not tolerate drought or wet feet, especially in winter. Avoid confusing lamium with Yellow Archangel, *Lamiastrum galeobdolon*, also a member of the mint family, which is notorious for becoming invasive.



Switchgrass

Panicum virgatum

This native grass is found in fresh or brackish marshes, wet meadows, prairies, dunes, even open wooded areas—in short, almost anywhere. The handsome green blades reach 3-6 feet. In late summer, they are topped by wispy clouds of seedheads, changing appearance with each angle of the sun. Give them full sun or a little shade, at most. Non-demanding about soil or water, the clumps slowly enlarge and are good for erosion control. Some self-seeding may occur. Foliage turns tawny brown in fall and can be cut back in spring or not. New blades will grow through it. The variety 'Shenandoah' has red foliage.



Boneset

Eupatorium perfoliatum

Used as medicine by Native Americans, boneset is a plant that, once recognized, you see everywhere. Happiest in damp environments, it flourishes by roadsides with bone-white blooms from July until October. Fondness for moisture makes it a good candidate for rain gardens or any damp spot, but it is flexible and grows in full sun to some shade and any soil except very dry. Its curious leaves clasp completely around the 1-5 foot stems, so the stem appears to “perforate” the leaves, hence its botanical name. Its flowers attract many pollinators and dry up to fuzzy seed heads enjoyed by birds or blown away on a parachute of fine hairs. Boneset also spreads by perennial rhizomes. Not favored by deer.



Butternut squash

Cucurbita moschata

Almost time to harvest this popular winter squash after the long summer wait. Stored indoors at 50-55 degrees, butternut squash can be enjoyed for months. Its lovely orange flesh is creamy, not stringy, with a sweet nutty flavor. In spring, plant 3-4 seeds together at 3 foot intervals after danger of frost. Select the strongest seedling in each group and clip off others. Don't be surprised when only male flowers are produced for the first 1-2 weeks before females appear. This is normal. Encourage pollinators by avoiding pesticides. Three weeks after flowering begins, feed this medium feeder ¼ lb. of 10-10-10 per 10 foot row. In fairly rich soil, you can forgo fertilizing. Harvest before heavy frost when the pale rind is very hard and the squash is heavy. Leave 3-4 inches of stem attached.



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