



Johnson's Garden Talk

Newsletter archives ... for the friends and customers of Johnson's Garden Centers

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Extreme Gardening

Jeremy Johnson, Johnson's Nursery Buyer

Extreme sports are popping up all over the place. First it was mountain biking, then bungee jumping, now street luge? With the coming of X Games and other nontraditional sports competitions, it seems that "extremes" are popping up everywhere.

Thinking about this about a year ago, frustrated with the way some things were going in my gardening, I began thinking to myself that to garden in the Kansas climate is really "extreme." With all of our variations in weather, plants have got to hate us for the seemingly minimal care that we are able to give them during certain times of the year.

While compiling things for our 2002 Plant Guide, I was asked to come up with a list of "Extreme Plants" for the landscape. These are plants that I have found to do very well in our climate. These stand up well in the heat of summer and also tolerate our wildly varying winter weather. Don't get Extreme Gardening confused with xeriscaping, which deals with water conservation in the landscape (though many Extreme Gardening plants also would be considered xeriscape plants). While this list is nowhere near inclusive, here are a few of my favorite Extreme Garden plants.

In the realm of perennials, there are many choices of great plants for your Extreme Garden. Achillea or Yarrow is a plant that blooms the entire summer, making dazzling cut and dried flowers. At Johnson's we offer several varieties. My favorite is 'Summer Pastels,' which provides a mix of pink, red, and yellow blooms all on one plant!

Another great extreme perennial is the 'Moonbeam' Coreopsis. While it may not be the most spectacular plant in a container, once they get established look out! 'Moonbeam' is enjoyable because its creamy yellow flowers bloom the entire summer, tolerating drought and heat.

While there are many wonderful Extreme Gardening shrubs, I will just cover a couple of favorites (at the moment)! Chastetree is a plant that has highly aromatic, very pointed leaves. When backed by the light blue flowers in summer, this plant is stunning. It is a fast grower that may actually be pruned as a tree form and enjoyed in that manner, or treated as a perennial and cut back to the ground each year. You just have to love the versatility that this plant provides.

My other personal favorite (at present) includes all of the Crapemyrtles. This broad group of plants ranges in size from 18 inches at maturity to over 10 feet, depending on the severity of the winter. Once these plants get established in the landscape, that pretty much takes care of everything. They begin blooming their whites, pinks, purples, and reds in mid-June and stop when the frost comes in the fall.

This is just a small sample of Extreme Gardening plants. Listed in our 2002 Plant Guide are many more plants that are well suited to our weather conditions. While Extreme Gardening may be a new concept, it's actually the same thing that successful Kansas gardeners have been doing all along, and continue to do in order to beautify their surroundings.