

# Ten High Performance Plants To Beat the Summer Heat

PHOTOS AND ARTICLE BY DEREK THOMAS

This summer will go into the record books for day after day of temperatures in the upper 90's to low 100's, rounds of explosive summer storms, and images of crushed houses under fallen trees.

This type of summer can wreck havoc on the moderate weather plants that Hill gardeners love and enjoy. In fact you don't have to look very far to see the signs that many plants have been having a very tough summer. Roses have suffered from more sunburn than black spot, lawns have been reduced to a sea of parched blades, and all those new trees that the city has planted now sport a decorative, scarf like, accessory -- a tree gator bag placed around its roots to provide the new saplings with additional water.

But there are plants that do love the heat, in fact thrive in it. And with proper planting now

many of these plants are perennial and will be around for many sweltering summers to come.

In fact a recent stroll around proved to me that the gardens of Capitol Hill will put on a good show this month in spite of the elevated mercury. The Hill's Crape Myrtles are geared up for a great end-of-summer show. Their huge pompom-like blooms provide color to the summer landscape for over a month. The Hardy Hibiscus now bloom endlessly. Their dinner-plate-sized blooms of red, pink, and white will provide blazing color to even the hottest of days. And lets not forget the carpet of riotous color the Portulaca has given to the sunniest of spots in the flower border.

The following list is my top eight picks for color and showiness in the heat of the summer.

## Brugmansia, Angel's trumpets

These shrubs are native to scrub areas and along streamside from south US to South America. Although they are not cold hardy in our region, the show that they give in the middle to end of summer make them a worthy investment. Their flowers are large, usually scented, and are pendant tubular or trumpet-shaped. Brugmansia aurea will give you one of the best shows, with ten to twelve large trumpet shaped flowers exploding at the same time. Provide them with well-drained, fertile, evenly moist soil and you will enjoy flowers up to first frost.

## Canna

With over 50 species cannas, these natives of Asia and tropical North and South America, Cannas are grown for their large, paddle shaped leaves, and their showy red, yellow, pink and striped flowers. Their leaves can come in greens, burgundy, and striped and will add impact to the border even when not in bloom. Cannas are not reliably cold hardy in our region, yet digging and storing in a cool basement is worth the effort when you experience these show stoppers in your border garden. Give Cannas a sunny spot with well-drained soil and water freely in dry spells. Cannas can also be added to your pond where they will perform well.



Hardy Hibiscus is striking with its dinner plate sized flowers

## Hardy Hibiscus

Within genus Malvaceae there are more than 200 species of deciduous and evergreen shrubs, trees, annuals, and herbaceous perennials. The hardy Hibiscus, *H. acetosella*, and *H. moscheutos* is perhaps one of the best summer showstoppers you can choose for the summer border. This upright, bushy, woody-based perennial produces long stalks



Crape Myrtle blooms with giant pom pom bloms from Late July to early September

with large deeply lobed, maple like leaves, and large dinner plate sized, crape paper textured flowers in red, white, and pink. Grow in moist well-drained soil and give full sun and plenty of heat to enjoy the best flowers possible.



Tropical and heat loving Cannas are a great focal or high impact plant



Portulaca creates a riotous carpet of exploding colors and thrives in the heat

### Rose of Sharon

This Hibiscus, Hibiscus syriacus, is a small tree, 12-14 feet max size, that when mature, produces hundreds of flowers from July to August. They enjoy being planted in a fertile, well-drained location. Be sure to work in plenty of compost when planting this tree and add an organic top dressing every spring to ensure a plentiful bloom season in mid summer.

### Lagerstroemia, Crape Myrtle

With over 50 species in this Genus, and a range from Asia to Australia it should come as no surprise that these small to large trees are one of the most popular in the summer landscape. There are many hybrids that have been developed by the Arboretum that are reliably hardy in Washington gardens. Their real attraction comes from their conical shaped pompoms of flowers. Borne at the tips of shiny dark green to burgundy leaves, set on fawn colored smooth limbs, this quick growing, drought tolerant, tree is a show stopping specimen in any garden. Give it moderately fertile,

well-drained soil and a full sun location.

### Cortaderia selloana, Pampas grass

For many years this was the most popular ornamental grass. It is a bold, extremely dramatic grass, reaching nearly twelve feet when its huge



Zinnia is a must for late summer in every garden

puffy white and pink blooms explode in mid August. The mature clumps can reach nearly five feet in diameter. This native of Argentina requires moist well-drained soil particularly in winter. Provide a mulch about 4" deep of straw, or hardwood to protect roots in colder winters.

Plant in full sun. Divide clumps in early spring for best results.

### Portulaca

This semi-succulent annual is found mostly in dry, sandy soils in warm tropical regions. They are grown for their showy, cup-shaped, rose like 4-7 petaled, scarlet, purple, yellow, pink, apricot, and white flowers. When planted as a mass border, in full sun there are truly few rivals in color and show. This plant prefers poor, sandy, well-drained soil in full sun.

### Zinnia

This star of the Aster family has many types, sizes, shapes, and color flowers, their ovate to elliptic green leaves, and rounded stems can come in bushy to tall varieties. There are many ways and places that Zinnias can be added to the flower border for a splash of color and charm in the annual bed or perennial garden. Grow

in fertile, humus rich, well-drained soil. Deadhead plants to prolong blooming.

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