

Look Backwards to Grow Forward

By Anne Carver

Oscar Wilde said, “It is only the modern that becomes old-fashioned.” Gardening trends can be short-lived but certain plants stay stars because they are carefree and perform eagerly year after year. Additionally, many old-fashioned favorites self sow, or naturalize. They fill and unify the garden and allow for plenty of plants to share. These beloved plants have been grown for centuries and moved from climate to climate, so they are destined to be the backbone of your garden.

They are guaranteed to be tough and practically pest free. To have an outstanding, modern garden that requires little water or maintenance, start by looking backwards at the plants that have stood the test of time.

Edible, Ornamental Amaranth

If you want to grow an edible, but don't have time for fussy vegetables or fruits, then amaranth is ideal. This rediscovered grain is popular because it is packed with iron, calcium, and protein. Its fiber content is triple that of wheat and the tasty leaves are also nutritionally power packed with three times the calcium and niacin found in spinach.

Many gardeners eat the leaves because harvesting the miniature grains is time consuming. However, the incredible blooms and the variety of leaves available from amaranth make it amply rewarding to grow.

The small leaves are delicious mixed in salads or sautéed. The long tassel-like flowers contain millions of seeds and they dry readily for use in floral arrangements. Be sure to shake the mature flowers over a newspaper to save seeds for the following summer. If you are ambitious, use the seeds by popping them like popcorn for a super nutritious breakfast.

Love-lies-bleeding (*Amaranth caudatus*) is an edible and ornamental variety that offers drama with low maintenance. Rapidly growing up to 10 feet tall, this plant develops red flowers that look like chenille tassels. The seeds need warm soil to germinate, so wait until May or June to sow when they will sprout readily even in poor soil. Plant in full sun and offer plenty of room to grow. Nearly pest free, this plant is drought tolerant and easy care in every way. Grow this stately, edible queen with other sun lovers like sunflowers or salvias.

Afternoon Surprise of Four O'Clocks

For lush looking, scented flowers try the longtime, favorite, four o'clocks (*Mirabilis nyctaginea*). Sometimes called the Marvels of Peru, this plant may have been exported from the Peruvian Andes in the 1500s. Some experts suggest they originated



Photo: Anne Carver

Love-Lies-Bleeding

in the American prairies. Whatever the true origin, these tuberous perennials emerge with bright flowers in the summer. Easy to grow from seed, they self-sow prolifically. Named for their habit of opening their flowers at four in the afternoon, these blossoms are fragrant only in the evening.

Expect trumpet-shaped, jewel-hued flowers, in orange, red, yellow and burgundy. This plant becomes a bushy, 35-inch tall mound, after emerging in late spring. These garden standards are attractive to hummingbirds and butterflies and they are deer resistant, pest free and drought tolerant.

Cloaking Trumpet Vine

Trumpet vine (*Campsis radicans*) flowers copiously in Southern California spring through autumn. Trumpet vines grow slowly the first year, but when they become established, watch out! They rapidly cover sheds, chain link fences and hard-to-plant hillsides. If you have an eyesore in your garden, like an old shed, or small dead tree this vine will engulf and camouflage it quickly. If you need shade, this vine's dense growth covers an arbor or a pergola for a cool nook.

Choose your spot to plant carefully in full sun with plenty of space; then enjoy blooms in shades of red, orange or yellow. The flowers attract hummingbirds in summer and birds in the winter, if you let the blooms become seedpods. This tough, carefree vine flourishes in almost any soil, except wet clay. Trumpet vine transplants easily and can be grown from cuttings.

If you want an easy care, beautiful garden, turn to the past. When considering plants, pick ones your grandmother grew. This guarantees a garden filled with steadfast, yet pleasing plants.

—Aenne Carver is a writer, workshop instructor and lecturer. Visit her web site, www.thethriftygardener.com, to view her gardening and vegetarian cooking blogs.

More Old-Fashioned Flowers with Modern Appeal

Annuals

Amaranth (*Amaranthus*)
 Cockscomb (*Celosia*)
 Pot marigold (*Calendula*)
 Bachelor's buttons (*Centaurea cyanus*)
 Larkspur (*Consolida ajacis*)
 Moss rose (*Portulaca grandiflora*)
 Spider flower (*Cleome hasslerana*)
 Strawflower (*Helichrysum bracteatum*)

Biennials

Hollyhock (*Alcea rosea*)
 Money plant (*Lunaria annua*)
 Queen Anne's lace (*Daucus carota*)

Perennials

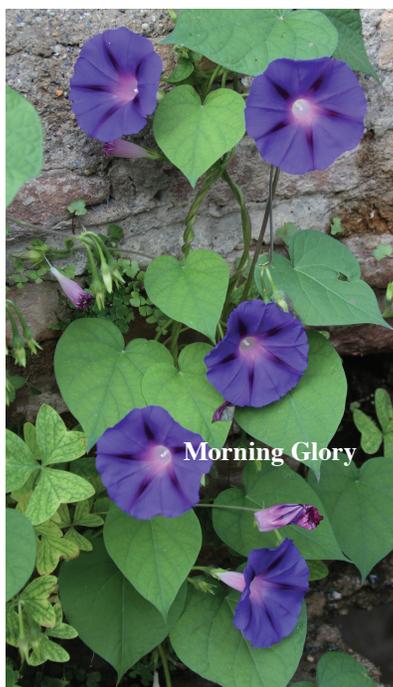
Anise hyssop (*Agastache*)
 Mugwort or wormwood (*Artemisia*)
 Stonecrop (*Sedum*)
 Daylily (*Hemerocallis*)
 Milkweed (*Asclepias*)
 Pincushion flower (*Scabiosa*)
 Red-hot poker (*Kniphofia*)
 Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)

Vines

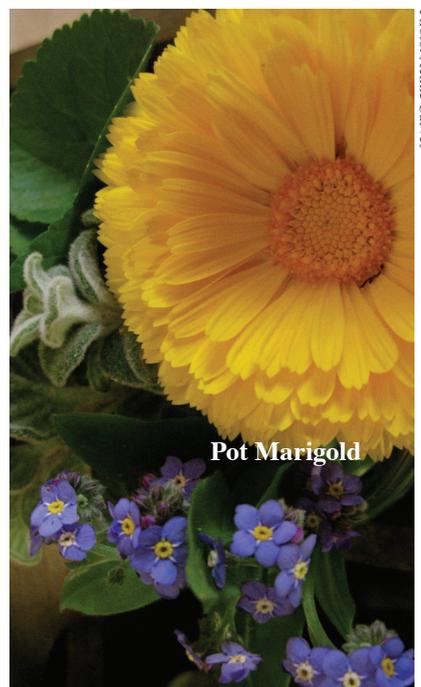
Love-in-a-puff (*Cardiospermum halicacabum*)
 Morning glory (*Ipomoea nil*)
 Moonflower (*Ipomoea alba*)



Red-Hot Poker



Morning Glory



Pot Marigold

Photo: Rachel Cobb

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