

Hot Summer Plant Contest Entries

#1 "Winner"

By **Wendy Wilson**

Teri asked what can thrive
When the humidity makes it 105

So I ventured to the garden braving mosquitos and snakes
What did I see for goodness sakes?

Weeds, weeds, weeds, but look there's more
Zinnas, rudbeckia attract bees galore!

Butterflies, hummingbirds use all their power
Sipping nectar from each little flower

Purple ruellia sway in the breeze
And scarlet gaura dance with ease

Caladiums nod their heads in the shade
While ospreys soar overhead unafraid

Though it's hot, though it's fierce, we give thanks to the lowcountry sun
For all these miracles, everyone.

Chi-chi Story

By **Pete Godbey**

Think we first noticed the Chi-chi at the corner of Rebut and Boundary Streets in Beaufort. Gee Mary liked the blue color close to the color of her PT Cruiser. I liked the fact that the plants were in a spot that got excess sun and little water, but seemed to thrive. Lo and behold I saw two plants at the commissary at Parris Island for \$5 each. The two plants thrive in full sun in the front of my blue house. I have over the years culled dozens of plants in pots for shut-ins, friends and family from Florida, North Carolina to Ohio.

Chi-chi also known as Mexican Petunia loose blossoms every hot afternoon, but gain them every morning. Bees and hummingbirds are fooled into checking blossoms for food, but find very little nourishment. With monthly feeding and weekly rain they do best, but seem to thrive on benign neglect. Chi's do not like freezing weather, but if protected will return with a bounty of blossoms. In cold weather areas I advise keep in pots and place in a sunny warm spot for the winter. Oh a word of warning, Chi's are alien, can take over that favorite sunny spot and push hydrangeas to wilt. I cut about a dozen canes to pass on every summer month to unsuspecting admirers.

By **Tina Szady**

In my garden in Hilton Head there does seem to be a flurry of bright color in this Summer heat, and I would consider a few plants tried and true flora of the hot variety. The show stopper is the bright yellow Goldsturm coneflower. It stands at attention to a three almost four foot height to one side of the walkway to my front door. The plants were a gift from a friend, Marie Ford, that she gave to me this spring. I did not plant these gifts until they were almost done living in the plastic container. When a weekend of spring rain forced the container to overflow, losing most of it's soil, it was time to either toss, or plant the gift. I chose the later, and that's when it took off like a 4th of July rocket. I certainly did not expect this coneflower to give me such a show that has lasted almost six weeks now, and is still thriving in spite of its poor start. I figure if this plant can tolerate my abuse and neglect, and then reward me with the brightest spot in my garden, it must be considered a hot loving plant, or a saint in the form of a living plant.

Another plant that seems to love this heat is the Mexican petunia, Ruella. The butterfly's and hummingbirds are enjoying the benefits of this ever blooming purple flowering perennial. The red canna's that were a gift from another friend, Jane Tennant, have also loved this heat. In my back yard the cosmos that were planted from seed are going strong. I do also find the sedum and hens and chickens stand up in this climate, and add a nice texture to the edge of the flower bed. Just yesterday I had a amarillis in bloom. I found this to be a odd time of year for this to be showing its flower. However, it is a nice surprise, and I can't help but think it must not be looking at the calendar.

If I could learn a lesson from these plants, it would be something like this: Put on your brightest and best color and don't let them see you wilt!

By **Jane Tennant**

Oh, those lazy, crazy days of summer! In the South Carolina Lowcountry, especially during the dog days of summer, that can mean hot, trying times for flowers and shrubs. The key to successful gardening during this time of summer is to grow things that tolerate, and even enjoy the hot temperatures and high humidity. One perennial that seems to love the Lowcountry heat is Ruellia brittoniana, or commonly known as "Mexican Petunias". This grows to 3-5 feet, and has a continuous blooming cycle. The flowers are purple, and do not need to be deadheaded, and should be planted in full sun. Mexican Petunias are extremely drought tolerant, can be used in xeriscape gardens, and tolerate the brutally hot temperatures of August. They can be invasive, and spread beyond where you want them, and this provides an opportunity to share a bit of your garden with others. It requires minimal care, and once established, requires no additional watering other than what Mother Nature provides. It is a perfect fit for the Zone 8-B where we garden.

Another perennial worth noting is Brugmansia, or Angel's Trumpet. If planted in an appropriate place where it receives dappled shade, it will perform very well in this area. My plant is well over 10 feet tall, and 12 feet wide, and is getting ready to bloom again. It is native to South America, so it tolerates both heat and humidity well. It dies back in the winter but returns every year faithfully, providing quite a visual display of large blooms. It will have the neighbors and passer-bys asking just what that plant is. It should be used as a specimen plant, where it can receive the attention and space it deserves. It seems to bloom in 3-4 week cycles, and large blooms hang off the plant in mass, and are quite beautiful. The last time mine bloomed, I counted over 70 flowers. It is a "must have" for those that have the space for such a show-stopper of a plant.

Both of these perennials perform well in Beaufort County, and will return every spring after a well deserved winter rest. They take the heat, humidity, and harsh conditions that August provides the gardeners in Beaufort County. If you don't have these, give them a try. I know I could share a few of the Mexican Petunias if someone is interested...

By **Georgene Stewart**

I was fortunate to have worked with Karen Geiger of Creative Gardening on Hilton Head this past spring and summer. Karen specializes in color and grooming beautiful flowers and shrubs. I learned so much about plants and their care, and got to visit some of the most beautiful estates on Hilton Head. It was real hands-on training I found useful.

Since I am a frugal gardener, I really appreciated receiving a multitude of plants that for reasons beyond our control (irrigation system problems, deer and rabbit damage, wind and salt burn from the ocean, or even just that the owner didn't like the plant,) they ended up in my yard.

I also successfully rooted cuttings from plants that were thriving SO well that they crowded out others, and had to be pruned.

My best achievement was a container I planted with 2 papyrus plants, 2 chartreuse sweet potato vines, and some cuttings from inky fingers coleus. The papyrus was almost dead, so I cut all the brown out, and watered well. The sweet potato vines came out of a planter in Wexford that was way too shallow, but the owner spent a lot of money on it, so we pulled it out and replanted something else. The inky fingers I rooted from cuttings I got from Sea Pines Center.

I absolutely love the contrasting colors and textures, and everything is doing great. I set the container near a bed of persian shield by my front walkway, and it really glows. Now I'd like to find out how to make paper from the papyrus!

My other favorite summer plant is a white ginger I got from another master gardener. It has just started to bloom, and the fragrance is intoxicating. It gets bigger every year. I'd be interested in a plant swap between MG's if we can set one up...maybe over several days, so more people can participate.

By **Marge Murray**

In a sun-baked flower bed at the end of my house sits an eight foot plumeria(the Hawaiian leis flower) blooming as though it thinks it's in Hawaii. It's been blooming since early June and is still going strong. I have watched it regularly because I thought no flower could bloom and stay fresh and beautiful for this long. It appears oblivious to the plants who have surrendered to the heat and looks as though it thinks spring has just begun. It has a large multicolored multiflowered bloom which is breath taking. It is directly in the afternoon sun which bears down on it from 1 o' clock to 6 o' clock with no protection except for its own beautiful leaves. I did something a little different last fall for the two plumerias. Instead of taking them out of their pot and wrapping them in newspaper as is suggested, I left them in their pots and did not prune them. As soon as it was warm enough I brought them out and placed them in this sunny bed where they thrived on all the compost and irrigation. The second plumeria plant is just beginning to bloom..It looks as if it has spent all of its efforts into becoming a plant beautiful in statue, so I have left it alone to see what will happen. As pretty and healthy as it is, I can't wait to see what it does this month. They both seem to say "Keep the sun coming. We love it." Weiiit." Adelaide Fletcher

When the heat of summer produces smaller and fewer roses, I depend upon many wonderful foliage plants to keep my garden interesting: Coleus, variegated Gardenia (many others too), Hosta "Bressingham Blue", Aspidistra, Ligularia, Persian Shield, Purple Heart, Canna Lilies, and Elephant Ears.

The foliage of many evergreen trees like my "Carolina Sapphire" Cypress and Deodora Cedar and shape of Palms (Canary Island Date Palm and Pindo Palm) add interest or a backdrop to a dull spot.

For "Flower Power" you can't beat Lantana, a non-stop bloomer that also attracts hummingbirds and butterflies, Plumbago, Oleander, and Bottlebrush (though more of a sporadic bloomer during the summer.)

The reseeding annuals like Jewels of Opar, Impatiens and New Guinea Impatiens, and Bi-annuals like Purple Coneflower, Foxglove, and Rose Campion never fail to add a splash of color.

Vines cannot be overlooked. Mandavilla (mine have over-wintered lately), Cleradendron, and Potato vine grow non-stop. These are great for pots as well.

Last, but not least, Dalias, Ruellia, Helianthus, Zinnia, and Black eyed Susan cannot be left out.

If you want a real expert to advise you, Jim Wilson's book: Bulletproof Flowers for the South a great reference.
