

LIFESTYLES

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Florida Plants of the Year

by Sheri Ann Richerson

The Florida Nurseryman and Growers Association (FNGA) launched the Plants of the Year program in 1998 in order to educate Floridians about plants that are superior and successful but usually underutilized.

To be considered for a Florida Plant of the Year designation, a plant must meet certain criteria such as good pest and disease resistance. Their maintenance must be reasonable, they should be fairly easy to propagate and grow, and they should exhibit some superior quality, improved performance or unique characteristic that sets it apart from others in its class.

Each year the plants are chosen by a selection committee that is made up of horticulturists, nurserymen, educators, landscape architects and other professional members of the horticulture industry that represents the entire state of Florida. This year the committee chose the following twelve plants which you will notice at your local nursery in specially designed pots that will assist you in making wise selections.

VIBURNUM OBOVATUM — Commonly called the Compact Walter's Viburnum, this is one of the earliest shrubs to bloom in the spring. It is a native evergreen shrub that can be used as a low hedge or specimen plant in the landscape since it has a very compact growing habit. It features white flowers in the spring and new growth has a red appearance. In the fall, the red fruit turns black.

APACHIS GLABRATA — Commonly called the perennial peanut, this species of *Arachis* is a mat-forming perennial rhizome. It is commonly used in the landscape as a flowering ground cover or even as a turf replacement. It will tolerate being mowed down, blooms from spring through fall and prefers a well-drained sunny area.

HYDRANGEA QUERCIFOLIA — Commonly known as the Oak Leaf Hydrangea, this is a deciduous flowering shrub that can be used in the landscape as either a specimen or in a mass planting.

It prefers to grow in light or medium shade and has fragrant creamy white clustered blooms. The foliage also provides interest in the landscape, first as a rusty-brown and then as a red-orange come fall.

MYRCIANTHES FRAGRANS — Known as Simpson's Stopper, this evergreen shrub is commonly used as a low hedge or specimen plant in the landscape. It has small, glossy leaves and bears small white fragrant flowers in late spring, followed by reddish-orange berries known for attracting birds.

BISMARCKIA NOBILIS — This Bismark Palm Tree is commonly used as a specimen plant in landscaping. The fronds of this variety are large and silver-blue in color. Although a pure green form does exist, it is less cold-hardy.

JUSTICIA SPICIGERA — This perennial shrub, commonly called the Orange Plume, bears bright orange tubular flowers

during the warmer months. In the landscape it is a good choice for an accent plant or for masses of color. For the maximum growth potential, plant in full sun or part shade.

ILEX X 'ROBIN' 9486 — This evergreen Holly makes a perfect specimen plant for the landscape, although it can also be used as a small tree or hedge. Although the plant has dark green, spiny leaves, they do have a reddish-maroon color to them when they first emerge. This is an improved variety and the glossy foliage really shows off the red berries.

CURCUMA ELATA — Commonly called the Giant Plume Ginger, this plant can be used as either a specimen plant or groundcover in the landscape. In the spring, the plant bears a bright pink inflorescence as the massive foliage begins to emerge. The flower is very exotic looking and makes a long-lasting cut-flower for arrangements.

CURCUMA ZEDOARIA — This Curcuma or Hidden Ginger as it is often called, is another great specimen plant or groundcover; however it does prefer shady conditions. It sports a maroon colored inflorescence with yellow flowers that appear in the spring before the foliage emerges. The foliage is very tropical looking with a purple midrib. The flowers of this plant also make an excellent cut-flower.

CURCUMA CORDATA (PETIOLATA) — Known as the Jewel of Thailand Ginger, this variety bears a one foot tall pink inflorescence with yellow flowers in the fall. However, the leaves of the plant make it a wonderful addition to the summer garden. In the landscape it is best used as either a specimen plant or a groundcover.

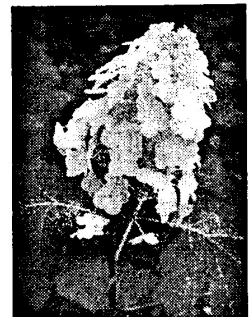
ZAMIOCULCAS ZAMIIFOLIA — This foliage plant, often simply referred to as ZZ, can be used in the landscape in a variety of ways; as a specimen plant, a ground cover or an accent plant. It also makes a great interior plant as it can tolerate high indirect light or low light. This plant is a succulent aroid that resembles a *Zamia* cycad. It is one of the few aroids that can be grown from a leaf cutting.

CODIAEUM 'MAMMY' — This is a very colorful Croton that prefers full sun. In the landscape, use it as an accent plant, hedge or specimen plant. Indoors, you will need to make sure that this plant receives very high light. The twisted leaves are a fiery orangish-red with green and yellow variegation giving this plant a unique look.

All of these plants are proven performers throughout Florida. "This program offers consumers proven, yet-underutilized plant material for their homes and landscapes," said Heather Nedley, Director of Marketing for FNGA. If you are looking to incorporate these plants into your plant palette, request them by name at your local garden center or discuss with your landscaper.



Jewel of
Thailand
Ginger



Oak Leaf
Hydrangea