
Where Now?

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Trying to fit a plant collector into an organized garden situation can be difficult. A true plant lover cannot be restrained by "beds." He plants until there's no space left—but that doesn't stop him or even slow him down.

Being azalea addicts, we accept that azaleas and rhododendrons are the most desirable plants for our gardens. Our need is to fit them into a comfortable situation, rather than as rowed out soldiers (onions). Perfectly rectangular or round beds and borders make me nervous. Drifts of plants that look as if they were born there, that curve gently—no ruffles, please—are more natural. A garden should wander and not be seen at a glance.

Wildflowers nestle between the larger plants and tend to show off before or after the azaleas for a spot of color. My favorites are bloodroot, trillium, *Iris cristata* (and other small iris), Solomon's seal (variegated, too), rue, thyme and lots of other herbs. But don't ignore the ferns; there are dozens of hardy ones—harts tongue (looks like bird's nest), maidenhair (several kinds), Christmas and Japanese are some I can't live without. They're exciting to watch spore, have all kinds of babies in the moss—moss is really beautiful (on rocks especially).

Hosta is a huge family—so many new ones—from yellow dwarfs to blue giants. Liriope is now turning heads with some of its new looks, from all the variegated ones to the beautiful black ones with great texture. Sarcococccas, hellebores, daylilies, primroses, scilla, grape hyacinth, tulips and daffodils, arums, forget-me-nots, equisetum, and selaginella all do their "thing" to create a natural effect. But do put bulbs and small plants in groups, not singles, and be sure to try the miniature bulbs. In sunny spots, try some of the exciting grasses.

Another "can't do without" is *Pieris japonica*. It's almost as wonderful as *Kalmia* (mountain laurel). Have you seen the new looks for them? The wonderment of it all is there's always a new variety to try. *Sciadopitys verticellata*, or Japanese umbrella pine is another favorite, hardy with unusual texture and color of foliage.

Of course, I can't say enough about camellias. They suffered a few years ago, but they've grown up again and look terrific. My 'Paulette Goddard' never lost a leaf in those bad winters, and 'Governor Mouton' held up almost as well. Very few varieties died, and all bloomed this year and are better than ever. Camellias are very happy in Richmond. We won't stop growing them because of the winter of '84.

Many azaleas have overgrown their allotment of space, and as they finish their bloom I try to give each a good haircut, keeping in mind how many months of the year each plant is truly attractive. I must check and be sure not to have too many of the same variety. Southern Indicas (such as 'George Lindly Taber') and many Glenn Dales (such as 'Martha Hitchcock') just get too big to keep. Do try some of the azaleas that rate high for foliage texture. Polly Hill's introductions are hardy with tiny ground-hugging habits. Some Satsuki's—'Rukizon', 'Yashio

Red' and the new (to us) curled 'Gyokurei', 'Seigai' and variegated foliaged 'Uke Funei'. The Girard's are crisp and the Linwoods soft. The Glenn Dales do it all, and the Robin Hills are lovely medium growers. There are so many new ones to try; it makes one (me) frantic!

The *Rhododendron kiusianum* 'Komo Kulshan' is outstanding, as are all *R. yakushmanum*. They all like to cuddle up to a big rock under a tall pine, a dogwood tree, or a lace leaf maple (with their lower limbs pruned up to allow in light).

After 35 years of serious gardening, my most valuable thinking is: move it! Admit your mistakes and try something new. If, after three years of trying a plant, you find it either sits and does nothing or grows and isn't the thing you hoped it would be, or even if it grows so much it swallows an area, move it or kill it. Don't take up valuable space with marginal plants. Traditional ideas of design need not be yours, for your interpretation of nature is purely your own. A garden should contain a sense of wonderment—of excitement—what's in the next turn of the path. It is a big experiment, and the pleasure comes from trying different combinations of plant material, large rocks (two-man) and weathered wood. The satisfaction of a garden is truly not in the finished product but in the doing. Don't fear taking an ax to that dogwood tree that came up in the wrong place.

More than anything else, your garden is yours; do it your way. If you like blue iris next to your pink azalea, do it. If you want six different hostas grouped together and one red dwarf maple, try it. If it doesn't look so great, it's not in cement: move it!! Remember, the thing we like most about gardening is that it grows and changes each day—don't let it defeat you—look at it as a chance to try a new azalea. □