I will admit it - my landscape is more of a plant zoo and does not really fit into any particular grand design! I like to collect plants and try growing different species as I find a space in my garden. Call it maintaining a plant potpourri or just increasing your plant palette; I would encourage you to try plants that you may have never considered before. Take for instance plants such as the Crinum Lily, the Chenille plant, the Dwarf Chenille plant and the Southern Wax Myrtle. These four plants offer a wide range of color and texture as well as function in the landscape.

The Crinum Lily is fairly common in local landscapes. You have probably seen these large herbaceous perennials that form massive rosettes of strap-like leaves growing up to five feet in height and width. In addition to the large leaves, the flowers produced are exotic and sweet-smelling. Crinum flowers can be white, pink or rose colored or even stripped red and white. Growing from a huge bulb, Crinums develop into clumps best planted in full-sun to part-shade locations. Keep in mind that these perennials are noted as being very tolerant of hot, dry conditions. Most Crinum plants have green leaves, but there are some reddish-purple-leaved cultivars. Used in mass planting, or as a specimen plant, Crinum Lilies also look good planted just outside of palms. Divide overcrowded clumps in the winter by removing and replanting the offshoots.

Have you every seen a Chenille plant or Acalypha hispida? Imagine a six-foot, green-leaved shrub covered with 18-inch red cattail-like flowers during the summer months on female plants. A fast grower, but also frost-sensitive, the Chenille plant is not commonly seen in our County. However, a very low-growing groundcover relative, the Dwarf Chenille plant or Acalypha pendula, is a real pleaser and fairly common garden subject. Growing only a few inches tall, the green leaves are accented with red, fluffy flowers. Growing best in full sun, the Dwarf Chenille plant can be used as a groundcover, a subject cascading over a low wall, in a rock garden or even in a hanging basket. If used as a groundcover, place it outside of foot traffic as it does not like to be walked on.

One final plant to consider including in your landscape is the native plant, Southern Wax Myrtle. A common plant all over our area in natural landscapes, Wax Myrtles can function as a small tree, a hedge or informal screen. The Wax Myrtle is a fast grower and can develop into a twenty-foot tall small tree. This plant takes salt well and can adapt to a wide variety of environments from moist sites to dry and alkaline soils. With some careful pruning, the somewhat droopy branches and frequent sprouting can be managed. If a naturally lower-growing subject is needed, consider a dwarf cultivar known as Pumila which only grows to about three feet tall. Female wax myrtles, if in the vicinity of a male plant, will produce waxy berries favored by wildlife.
All four of these plants are usually available at most garden centers. Expand your plant palette and consider these plants in your own plant zoo! For more information and suggestions on all types of plants suitable for Charlotte County, please contact our Master Gardeners on the Plant Lifeline at 941.764.4340 from 1:00pm until 4:00pm Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Our office is located at 25550 Harborview Road, Suite 3 in Port Charlotte. Our Plant Clinics are available across the county:

- Demonstration Garden every Thursday from 9:00am until 11:00am.
- Englewood/Charlotte Public Library 9:00am until noon every Monday.
- Mid County Regional Library first and third Thursday of the month from 1:00pm until 3:00pm.
- Edison College Learning Resources Library third Tuesday of the month from 1:00pm until 4:00pm.

Ralph Mitchell is the county extension director/horticulture agent for the Charlotte County Cooperative Extension Service. You may contact him by e-mail Ralph.Mitchell@charlottefl.com. You may also contact a volunteer Master Gardener from 1:00pm until 4:00pm Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 941.764.4340 or by e-mail Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com.

For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Steele, at 941.764.4340. Allison can help educate you about the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program so that you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.

Resources:


