

## **A WORD OR TWO ABOUT GARDENING**

### **Put some regal splashes of color in your Miami-Dade landscape**

As part of an ongoing review of garden color, this month's article focuses on plants that contribute purple to the Miami-Dade landscape. Of three previous articles on this topic two have dealt with primary colors, yellow and blue. Purple is one of the secondary colors (produced by mixing two primary colors) in this instance red and blue. In fact purple is not a single color but is technically termed a color group, extending from blue-purple (indigo) to light pinkish purple (lavender) with mauve in between. As will become apparent the plants chosen for discussion encompass the entire range of this 'color group'.

Purple is often associated with royalty and occasions of state but in the landscape like blue it is considered to have a cooling effect, used to give the landscape depth. Use purple flowering plants for an out of the way corner of the garden where you might want to just quietly sit and cogitate. If your yard is too small to provide quiet corners, purple like blue flowering plants can be used around the perimeter to create a greater sense of distance. Within this color group, there is a full range of plants from which to choose- foliage and bedding plants to shrubs, vines and trees. While we will focus on flower color, first a few words about plants that contribute colorful fruits or foliage.

An outstanding example of colorful fruit in a landscape plant is the native **beautyberry** (*Callicarpa americana*). It has rather insignificant flowers, but is much admired for the profusion of small ornamental reddish purple berries that cluster round the stems. Some plants are appreciated for both the impressive floral display and colorful fruits: for instance the underused ***Medinilla cumingii*** (grape-like clusters of pale pink flowers followed by bright bluish purple berries) and ***Saraca thaipingensis*** (yellow asoka, globular heads of small orangey yellow flowers followed by reddish purple pods).

For purple leaf color suffice to say the choice is extensive, especially for foliage plants such as alocasias and colocasias, discussed in a previous article on accent plants. A variety of other plants offer the bonus of purple leaves in addition to a spectacular flower display (e.g., the popular shrub ***Clerodendrum quadriloculare*** - Starburst) as well as bedding plants/groundcovers (***Plectranthus* 'Zulu Wonder'** and **'Mona Lavender'**, leaf underside). The latter two, especially 'Zulu Wonder', favor partial shade and moist soil and although perennial usually struggle to survive a south Florida summer. For shady situations (bright light, no direct hot sun) where greater permanency is required, **Persian shield** (*Strobilanthes dyerianus*) is a small shrub that offers eye catching silvery purple leaves and pleasing if not showy spikes of bluish white flowers. Keep the soil moist and cut the stems back to prevent the shrub from becoming too leggy.

Familiar as a local groundcover **purple queen** (*Tradescantia pallida* 'Purple Heart') can be visually overwhelming if used to excess. It is more effective when contrasted with low/ compact growing plants of complementary color (e.g., *Duranta* 'Gold

Mound', *Allamanda* 'Golden Butterflies' or the non-invasive *Lantana* 'Gold Mound'). Although drought tolerant, purple queen acquires a dull cast in dry full sun areas and appears more luxuriant where soil remains moist and there is some partial afternoon shade. **Coleus** is another familiar, easy to grow bedding plant that offers several purple leaved cultivars. Although usually grown in dappled shade some cultivars will take full sun including the purple 'Plum Parfait', 'Felix' and "Fack'. For summer color in full sun there are purple leaved **ornamental sweet potatoes** such as 'Ace of Spades and 'Blackie' (watch out for white fly and especially sweet potato weevil), and various cultivars of **joyweed** (*Alternanthera* sp.) The latter includes calico plant (*A. tenella* syn. *A. ficoides*) and Brazilian joyweed (*A. brasiliensis*).

Provide moist soil and for good leaf color plant in full sun.

One final purple leafed plant of note has recently appeared in the "cactus and succulent" section of some local garden centers (usually a grab bag of unnamed specimens!). This is the striking ***Aeonium arboreum* 'Swartkopf'** with rosettes of glossy wedge shaped deep reddish purple leaves born on branching 3-4' succulent stems. These are members of the Crassulaceae requiring a gritty rapidly drying soil and plenty of sun for full leaf color. They are adapted to a Mediterranean climate (hot dry summers, warm wet winters) so in Miami-Dade expect at a minimum notable leaf loss during summer.

From leaf color, to some **purple flowered bedding plants**. The following are good for late winter/spring flower color - although perennial, local experience in Miami-Dade finds all struggling to last through summer: *Angelonia* ('Angel Mist' or 'Serena Purple'), *Heliotropium* ('Marine' or 'Fragrant Delight') *Cleome* ('Purple Queen', spider plant) and *Otocanthus caeruleus* (bluish to deep violet, Brazilian snapdragon). There are also the familiar favorites of the winter/spring flower garden such as salvias, petunias and verbenas. The purple form of cat's whiskers (***Orthosiphon aristatus***) can survive summer given light afternoon shade and moist soil as will the showy **purple *Spathoglottis*** (terrestrial orchid) which needs organically enriched moist but free draining soil. In cool shaded areas (bright light) use **blue ginger** (*Dichorisandra thyrsiflora*) - it is neither blue (deep violet purple inflorescence) nor a ginger (related to purple queen). The foliage resembles that of a ginger and like some gingers (e.g., curcumas) is lost during winter. When in active growth maintain soil moisture, then as foliage dies down in late fall allow soil to become drier.

When considering purple flowering shrubs the Solanaceae (potato family) is a rich source of both blue and purple flower color of which the following are a few examples. With rising temperatures in late winter ***Lycianthes rantonneti***, a 5-6' somewhat lax shrub, provides a profusion of showy flowers, having a disc of fused violet petals and a yellowish center. The cv '**Royal Robe**' is most often grown, the deep purple petals in sharp contrast to the flower's small bright yellow center. Grow in full sun and prune to encourage repeat flowering.

Another group of solanaceous plants, the **iochromes**, have slender tubular flowers (like miniature brugmansias to which they are related). In a previous article on color in the landscape I discussed *Lochroma cyaneum*, a 6-8' shrub with attractive grayish green leaves and pendant clusters of blue to deep violet flowers. For present purposes consider two desirable cultivars, the mauve '**Plum Beauty**' and the rich

bluish purple 'Indigo'. Sometimes grown as a small (10 – 12') small tree *lochroma grandiflorum* has larger deep purple flowers. lochromes are best if grown on moist enriched soil with some partial shade from hot afternoon sun. They readily wilt during late spring and summer if grown in full sun and not frequently watered. During summer flea beetles can disfigure leaves. Other solananaceous shrubs include *Solanum wrightii* (potato tree) a large, fast growing, short lived shrub with prickly stems and leaves. The conspicuous star shaped purple flowers fade to lavender then to white. This is similar to ***Brunsfelsia grandiflora*** (yesterday, today and tomorrow) a more restrained less coarse 6-12' shrub that also has flowers that fade to white. These commence a bluish purple fading through shades of lavender to white. Brunsfelsias favor organically enriched soil and light afternoon shade.

The Acanthaceae also includes some outstanding blue and purple flowered shrubs, such as *Eranthemum pulchellum* (blue sage) a winter flowering favorite discussed in a previous article. Less often seen is ***E. wattii*** a smaller more open shrub with fewer but larger deep purple flowers. It is less vigorous than *E. pulchellum*, but requires similar growing conditions (partial shade, enriched soil, adequate summer moisture with reduced watering during winter). The deep purple flowered, eye-catching **purple firestick** (*Odontonema callistachyum*) commences flowering in early spring as the eranthemums are fading. There are two flower forms: one pale lavender and the other a far more conspicuous deep magenta. Purple firestick is a fast growing herbaceous shrub that should be pruned back hard after flowering and thereafter to encourage a more compact growth habit. It does well when planted on the east side of a residence where it is not exposed to late afternoon sun.

Possibly the most popular of purple flowering sub-tropical shrubs are the **tibouchinas**. Unfortunately most are poorly adapted to Miami-Dade limestone (much more successful in central Florida) and require consistently moist but free draining soil. This includes the purple glory tree (*T. granulosa*) and what is offered as *T. urvilleana*. Note that naming of tibouchinas is confused and unreliable. One specimen that is commonly offered in local garden shops, sold simply as tibouchina, is a sprawling weak stemmed shrub with pilose, silvery, mid green leaves with bluish purple flowers (*T. clavata* or hybrid?). This is somewhat more tolerant of alkaline soils and can make an attractive shrub for a few years if the soil is not allowed to dry and it is trimmed to maintain a tidy appearance.

The red flowered Chinese hat (*Holmskjoldia sanguinea*) is not uncommon in landscapes, growing as a scandent shrub that is often tied to a support or allowed to grow into an open tree. For present purposes there is also a much less used more erect purple flowering species, *H. tettensis*. Commonly referred to as the **purple cup and saucer plant**, this is an attractive subject for low maintenance landscapes. It adapts well to poor soil and is moderately drought tolerant, especially if planted where there is partial shade. The flowers have a purple tubular corolla with a flattened, pinkish discoid calyx. Another underutilized drought tolerant shrub is **star lavender**, ***Grewia occidentalis*** an easy to grow sprawling woody shrub with long straight branches and non-invasive roots that render it especially suited for espaliering against a wall. Star lavender can also serve as a colorful informal screen, ideal to hide a chain link fence. The flowers, which are principally seen in

spring through early summer, are purple lavender, star shaped with a central boss of golden yellow anthers. Grow in full sun or light shade and prune as necessary. Locally few pest problems apart from occasional snow scale on stems.

If you have a place in your landscape for a purple flowering vine there are plenty from which to choose. Some such as passion vines and bougainvilleas are already very popular in south Florida. A few of the many **passion vines** that include purples in their flowers are 'Purple Tiger' (white and purple filaments), "Purple Haze" (pale to darker purple center), 'Alato Caerulea (purple corona), 'Elizabeth' (mauve), 'Jeanette' (violet), *Passiflora laurifolia* (purple corona) and *P. serratifolia* (mauve to deeper purple). **Bougainvillea glabra** is the species type with purple colored bracts (more compact than the red *B. spectabilis*, it can be grown as a shrub). There are also purple cultivars: 'Royal purple' (similar to the more compact 'Elizabeth Angus', but adapts better to humid south Florida), 'Juanita Hatten' (deep magenta, suitable for containers), 'Violet' (dark purple), 'Purple Queen' (reddish purple, also listed as 'Monteth') and 'Harrissi' (purple with wavy variegated foliage). Bougainvilleas can take hard pruning up to early fall, however be far more restrained with less vigorous dwarf types (especially those with variegated foliage) restricting yourself to tip pruning as flowering ceases.

Another popular woody vine is **queen's wreath (*Petrea volubilis*)** which needs a sturdy support and full sun. On Miami-Dade limestone the leaves are paler, but the vine still produces vigorous growth. The inflorescence consists of racemes of many flowers each with a short lived purple corolla (petals) that contrast with the persistent grayish blue calyx. Individual plants can vary in flower color with some having lighter colored more lavender petals.

Less familiar but occasionally seen in local landscapes are four related vines of the Apocynaceae. **Purple allamanda** (*Allamanda blanchetii*) is a weakly climbing vine (more a scandent shrub) that should be tied to a support – good for a chain link fence. With pruning it can be grown as a rather lax shrub. The flowers are funnel shaped with somewhat flaring rosy purple petal lobes and a darker reddish purple throat. Flowers vary in color intensity. The more popular **Allamanda 'Cherries Jubilee'** is similar with flowers having purplish pink lobes, a reddish purple throat and yellow tube. Allamandas are susceptible to nutritional problems on limestone, especially manganese (make foliar applications of a trace element spray). Maintain soil moisture during warm weather with reduced irrigation during winter and apply a slow release fertilizer in late spring and late summer. Cold weather will cause leaf drop and some die-back – remove dead stems in late winter.

**Rubber vines** (*Cryptostegia*) are related to allamandas but easier to grow. Like most members of the Apocynaceae they contain milky white irritant sap. The common rubber vine (*C. grandiflora*) is a vigorous twining vine with opposite thick glossy leaves and funnel shaped lilac to deeper pinkish purple flowers with flared lobes. The Madagascar rubber vine (*C. madagascariensis*) is similar, the flowers reddish purple, with more rounded corolla lobes. This latter species occurs as a volunteer on non-cultivated land in several south Florida counties. To reduce the risk of unintended spread remove seed pods (paired rigid follicles containing flattened hairy seeds) as they form.

Look out for a couple of less common vines especially ***Dalechampia dioscoraeifolia*** (**winged beauty**). Like poinsettias this a member of the spurge family that features enlarged colorful bracts. These subtend clusters of highly modified small yellow flowers. In *D. dioscoraeifolia* the bracts, which are borne on thin twining stems are crepe like and conspicuous neon purple. The vine can climb to 20' and thrives on an organically enriched, moist but free draining soil and should be grown where there is some partial shade from hot afternoon sun. Almost all members of the genus are vines, *D. roezliana* being an exception - a slow growing small shrub to 3½' with lighter purplish pink bracts.

If you are looking to replace storm damaged trees the familiar **queen's crepe myrtle**, ***Lagerstroemia speciosa*** is an excellent choice. This has been offered as part of Miami-Dade's 'Adopt-a-Tree' program. On occasion it has stimulated concern from those who don't realize that it is deciduous – it is normal for the tree to lose its' leaves during winter. Mature trees can grow to almost 80', but given local soil conditions expect a maximum of 30-35'. Young trees often branch low to the ground and should be pruned early to encourage a central leader. The tree develops a full dense crown and attractive peeling bark. Where grown along side larger trees growth is more upright, the canopy higher and not as rounded and the base of the trunk develops a flare. Leaves are prominently veined, deep green turning autumnal reds before they drop. Flowers appear in summer, varying from lavender to almost magenta. The tree should be mulched and receive an application of a complete slow release palm fertilizer in spring as new foliage appears. Trace element deficiencies can develop on Miami limestone. Given adequate maintenance the tree is storm tolerant.

Another 'Adopt-a-Tree' give-away, **lancepod** sometimes known as Florida lilac, is neither a Florida native nor a lilac. The species most often offered in south Florida is listed as *L. violaceus* (syn *Lonchocarpus* sp.), but there is confusion over names. Lancepod is a small tree, to 20 - 30', with rather thin arching branches, compound leaves composed of three to five 2-3" leaflets and upright clusters of pinkish purple to purplish violet pea like flowers. In Miami expect flowering in late summer/fall. The tree will survive limited periods of dry weather but prefers moist soils. Look for signs of nutritional deficiencies (iron and magnesium) when grown on Miami-Dade limestone. One species, *L. punctatus*, has been recorded as growing in non-cultivated areas of Monroe County (Keys).

A showy small tree (≈15') that should be on anyone's list is **maroon jacaranda**, ***Jacaranda jasminoides***, better adapted to south Florida's hot humid climate than the more familiar blue *J. mimosifolia* (which is flowers far more profusely in the drier climate of southern California). Maroon jacaranda has fewer flowers but each flower is far larger, trumpet shaped and a deep plum purple. The leaves are pinnate and not as feathery as the bi-pinnate leaves of *J. mimosifolia* having fewer but much larger leaflets. The tree also differs in flowering on and off throughout the year and not being deciduous. For reliable flowering purchase only grafted trees.

Finally ***Bolusanthus speciosus*** (**tree wisteria**), a small tree that has been little used in south Florida since it was first enthusiastically promoted by Menninger. It grows to no more than 18' and in spring while briefly bare produces hanging

clusters of deep bluish purple, pea-like flowers (similar to *Lonchocarpus* with which it was once included). Possibly one reason it is not more widely used is the relatively short season for flowering, but the tree has other attributes: fibrous attractively fissured bark, drooping branches, hard termite resistant wood and non intrusive roots. In addition the size and relatively slow rate of growth makes it amenable to container culture (excellent patio tree). Tree wisteria is highly adaptable as to soil (including limestone) providing it is not heavy drains freely. It naturally develops multiple trunks, but can be grown to a single leader with early pruning.

There are of course many more plants that can supply the broad range of shades that comprise purple as a color group. Look for some to complement the yellow flowering plants described in an earlier article (archived at <http://miami-dade.ifas.ufl.edu/publications.htm> ).

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