

My father-in-law, from Sabine Parish, served many years as the voice of the Many Tiger football team. During that time he coined the phrase “tough as woodpecker lips” to describe the team’s ability to produce under pressure. This phrase seems especially appropriate for gardening in August because plants that thrive in harsh, high temperature/low precipitation conditions have to be “tough as woodpecker lips”!

I asked my fellow Master Gardeners to share their favorite hot weather, drought tolerant plants with us....

Kit Hanley, Master Gardener President, says she can’t do without her asparagus fern (*Asparagus aethiopicus*). It gets so hot on her westward facing front porch that she says the doorknob will burn your hand, but asparagus fern doesn’t care. It is actually a branching perennial herb which may explain its hardiness, but beware! Asparagus fern is toxic to domestic cats and dogs.

Donna White recommends Veronica (*Veronica spicata*), aka speedwell, a tenacious perennial with upright, spiked blooms. They come in a range of colors from deep blue, lavender-blue, pink, and white. Veronica grows to a mature height and spread of 12 to 24 inches.

Lou Taylor is enjoying a combination of blue salvia, pink pentas, and white caladiums. This grouping must have looked great on the Fourth of July! There are annual and perennial salvias; always opt for the perennial. Indigo Spires is a great choice. Caladiums grow from bulbs that can be dug up in the fall and stored in a dry, cool location to be replanted next year. Strap leaf caladiums perform better in sun. Try varieties like Red Flash, Fire Chief, White Queen, and Pink Gem.

Cathy Barr loves her tropical hibiscus (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*); so do humming birds and butterflies. With flowers ranging in color from pink to red to peach and ranging in size to six inches, hibiscus is showy and heat resistant. However, tropical hibiscus does like to stay evenly moist.

Kathy Davis recommends a hibiscus as well, the Texas Star Hibiscus (*hibiscus coccineus*). Kathy says, “It freezes down in winter and pops right back in spring; seems to thrive on neglect.” She also nominates Summer Phlox (*phlox paniculata*). “There is usually a hummingbird hovering over it. (Horticulturist)Greg Grant calls it one of the best butterfly attracting plants we have (especially swallowtails),” she adds.

Dee Hudson and Carolyn Sutton both endorse gomphrena (*Gomphrena globosa*). You may know this plant by the name globe flower. Try “Buddy” purple or “Strawberry Fields” pink. Carolyn also champions narrow leaf zinnia (*Zinnia angustifolia*). “Crystal white” is the variety she grows.

Patricia Jones swears by her bromeliads. Bromeliads are any member of the pineapple family with thick, leathery leaves and colorful spiky flowers. Patricia says, “Mine start out as a house plant and then get put out into the yard”. Although these plants need little water, they do need some shelter from hot afternoon sun. Check out Urn Plant, Scarlet Star, Flaming Sword, and Pink Quill.

Cheryl Maxwell reminds us that native plants like American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) are adapted to hot, dry north Louisiana summers. This shrub is setting berries now for a beautiful fall display. The berries will be a striking purple set against leaves that turn yellow.

Here at Turkey Creek Garden, I have enjoyed growing a new annual I bought at the Master Gardener Spring Plant Sale. It is Melampodium (Melampodium paludosum), a large, bushy annual with yellow daisy flowers. It is in full sun and gets watered only twice a week, but looks great!

There are many other plants that are “tough as woodpecker lips” to incorporate into your landscape in preparation for next August. Many will be available at the Master Gardener Spring Plant Sale in April. For Master Gardener photographs and more information about “tough as woodpecker lips” plants go to www.growingbranchesq.blogspot.com and click on Turkey Creek Garden.