

## High Summer Problems

By Susan Camp

From The Observer:

July 2, 1950

There are some moments when I feel pleased with my garden, and other moments when I despair. The pleased moments usually happen in spring, and last up to the middle of June. By that time all the freshness has gone off; everything has become heavy; everything has lost that adolescent look, that look of astonishment at its own youth. The middle-aged spread has begun.

Vita Sackville-West

What a perfect expression of my feelings about the front garden over the last week! Of course, Sackville-West wrote these words about her gardens at Sissinghurst Castle in southeast England, and I am despairing over the way some of my plants suffer in the heat and humidity of Gloucester with only sporadic rainfall for several weeks, but I feel a kinship.

After a spring of pastel loveliness that ended with some restrained Chelsea chopping, I feel somewhat deflated and less than eager to venture outside to work after 10:00 a.m. I now wish that I had chopped more robustly. The catmint (*Nepeta x faassenii*), lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*), and the huge clump of Greek oregano (*Origanum vulgare*) are escaping their set boundaries and looking leggy and untidy. There isn't much I can do right now, because their blossoms are filled with butterflies and so many species of bees that the beds are buzzing, and the plants appear to dance.

If, like me, you are feeling the same sense of "What's the use of bothering?" in this intense heat, it may be time for all of us to start planning some garden changes for next year.

At the top of my list is to Chelsea chop with greater enthusiasm next spring so I don't feel overwhelmed by the heights of some perennials. Next, I will move the daylilies along the walkway outside the picket fence into a garden bed that previously contained creeping phlox and low-growing coreopsis. I hope this will help decrease the occurrence of deer nipping off fresh buds every night.

The hosta problems are next on the list. The hostas in the border outside the fence face two problems: nightly visits by deer and not enough shade. This issue will require careful study, and I hope I find a spot where they can stay cool and safe from grazers.

The hosta issue leads into the most serious problem: I need to plant more heat and drought tolerant perennials. If such perennials also are deer tolerant, it would be like winning the Trifecta.

In June, I listed numerous perennials that are deer resistant or tolerant, including native and introduced Mediterranean herb members of the mint family that deer avoid because they don't

like the aromatic fragrance and the fuzzy texture of the foliage. Native deer tolerant perennials include obedient plant (*Physostegia virginiana*) and blue star (*Amsonia* spp.) Fortunately, many of these perennials also tolerate full sunlight, high temperatures, and dry spells.

Old-fashioned cottage pinks (*Dianthus plumarius*) are European natives and favorite garden perennials. Pinks have long been featured in cottage gardens for their dainty flowers, mounded, gray-green foliage, and spicy clove scent. *Dianthus* 'Feuerhexe' ('Firewitch') is a mat-forming 6-inch cheddar pink with magenta flowers that works well at the front of a border.

Anise hyssop (*Agastache foeniculum*) is a North American prairie and plains perennial that reaches 2 to 4 feet in height. It produces lavender to purple anise-scented flowers from June to September and tolerates deer, drought, and dry soil once it is established.

New York ironweed (*Vernonia noveboracensis*) an eastern and southeastern U.S. native, can grow up to 6 feet in height, producing small purple flowers in August and September. It is deer tolerant, and is performing well in a hot, sunny border next to Jim's office.

See Missouri Botanical Garden Plant Finder entries on these and other deer, drought, and heat tolerant plants.

Consider providing a source of clean water for birds and small animals during these hot, muggy days. Squirrels get thirsty, too!