

## The good, the bad, and the ugly

I love gardening in the far corner of the Southeast, but sometimes it can be a real challenge. The climate in northern Florida is transitional, as it is affected by weather from the temperate North as well as from the tropical South. As a result, I'm able to grow many temperate and subtropical plants side by side. The experimentation is fun, but when I get it wrong, there's no telling what kind of gardening mayhem will be unleashed.

Take **impatiens** (*Impatiens walleriana* cvs., USDA Hardiness Zones 10–15), for example, considered well-mannered bedding plants in the North. In the Deep South, these jewels are the proverbial wolf in sheep's clothing. When I first planted them for summer color, I had no idea I'd be witness to a botanical explosion. Aided by spring-loaded seedpods, mild winters, and plenty of moisture, impatiens have become my nemesis, as they sprout in every nook and cranny and form an eternal bond with any shrub or perennial in sight.

The **Leyland cypress** ( $\times$  *Cupressocyparis leylandii*, Zones 6–9), on the other hand, has been just a disappointment. When I planted a row of trees at the edge of my property 15 years ago, I'd hoped that they would quickly provide much-needed privacy. Within six years, they were 15 feet tall, and all was well in my private universe—until they promptly began to die from *Cercospora* needle blight (a disease increasingly common to Leylands in the South). I was eventually left with a row of brown, dead trees and a major landscape-renovation project.

The **Lenten rose** (*Helleborus orientalis*, Zones 4–9) has also been a letdown. While it's reliable in states just north of Florida, this coveted perennial continually breaks my heart, as my plants get bigger and healthier looking only to fall short in bloom production. For some reason, I keep them around. Then just when I've resigned to the fact that they'll never amount to anything, a few blooms appear, giving them yet another reprieve.

Though I'm too far south to grow some plants, there are others I'm quite attached to that do well here. One in particular is the compact, abundantly flowering

Hydrangea



Chinese fringe flower



Summer snowflake



Impatiens

'**Lanarth White**' hydrangea (*Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Lanarth White', Zones 6–9). This pristine white lacecap is sure to put a spring in any gardener's step. It has been around for a long time—the plants in my garden are nearing 30 years old—yet it remains as dependable as ever.

'**Ruby**' Chinese fringe flower (*Loropetalum chinense* f. *rubrum* 'Ruby', Zones 8–9) is another excellent garden mainstay. Strangely, I only recently discovered this wonderful sun-loving shrub, but I now have it scattered about in small groupings throughout my garden. Plants start blooming early in March and, with regular trimming, continue to produce a profusion of pink flowers above burgundy foliage until fall. Not bad, for a minimum amount of effort.

I know of few plants that offer as much and ask for as little as '**Gravetye Giant**' summer snowflake (*Leucojum aestivum* 'Gravetye Giant', Zones 3–9). This marvelous 24-inch-tall bulb is one of the first plants to emerge, with nodding white bells as early as mid-January. Nearly 20 years ago, I scattered 'Gravetye Giant' along paths and in perennial beds. The plants have unfailingly risen every year since, making morning walks even more pleasant. Gardening here in the Southeast has its fair share of challenges, but for me, the successes far outweigh the disappointments. The cream definitely rises to the top.

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