

SEVEN PLANTS NO UPSTATE SOUTH CAROLINA GARDEN SHOULD BE WITHOUT

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Sir Peter Smithers, reportedly the inspiration for Ian Fleming's James Bond, made a career in the world of spying amid high-stakes espionage. He retired to Switzerland where he enjoyed a vast garden, employing a number of ideas shared in his book, *The Adventures of a Gardener*.

- **"The pleasure of owning a fine plant is not complete until it has been given to friends."**
– Sir Peter Smithers (London: The Harvill Press with The Royal Horticultural Society, 1995)

Some of the plants on my list of recommendations are frequently shared among gardeners or can be obtained rather cheaply. Remember that every great plant is not necessarily an Royal Horticultural Society Award of Merit winner, the latest patented introduction or something heavily promoted in specialty magazines or catalogues. Native species, heirloom and pass-along plants have stood the test of time because they perform well, not because of marketing hype.

- **Sir Peter advocated planting the type of garden that grows and ages well with you.**

In other words, use a variety of textures and heights to add a sense of dimension to the garden. Plant densely to minimize weeding. And plant in a manner in which the shrubs and trees simply expand over time, filling in gaps and reducing the amount of maintenance required to keep the garden going. As we get older, less maintenance sounds like a dream, doesn't it?

In my own garden, I have employed Sir Peter's planting philosophy as much as possible. A variety of trees, shrubs and flowers have been planted to add texture and dimension. An effort to grow plants in a small space requires planting densely as he advised. My weeding is significantly reduced as a result. The following list of recommended plants are examples of specimens that have stood the test of time for me, enduring drought, rainy spells, cold, heat and our infamous humidity:

- *Cercis canadensis* ‘Covey’ (Lavender Twist®)
(Weeping redbud) Offers a profuse display of pea-like rose-purple flowers in early spring before foliage appears. Staked specimens can grow upwards to 10 feet tall. Lush foliage trails to the ground, draping like a wedding gown train. A great garden focal point!



Cercis canadensis ‘Covey’ (Weeping redbud
‘Lavender Twist’®)

This tree can be staked to grow up to ten feet in height. Its flowers appear in early to mid-spring (first week or two of March, in many cases).

- *Echinacea tennesseensis*
(Tennessee coneflower) Distinctly different from the common *E. purpurea* or the blackeyed Susan-looking *E. paradoxa* (which appears so prominently in the pedigree of today’s modern hybrids, particularly those bred by Saul Nurseries near Atlanta). Features brown disks with purple rays. Can grow up to 2 ½ feet in height, but mine have always been a foot or less. A rare species from Middle Tennessee (Metro Nashville), namely Davidson, Wilson and Rutherford Counties. Easily introduced into the garden via seed from various commercial sources. My plants came from Clemson University. A great little conversation piece not often seen in gardens and virtually never seen at commercial nurseries.

- *Liatris spicata* (Blazing stars) This wildflower is attractive to butterflies, blooming between June and August. Needs full sun, but tolerates a range of soils and moisture levels (damp to outright wet). My plants do quite well, even in dry clay. Popular among florists, the flowers are attractive in arrangements or stunning in a vase all by themselves. Easily

propagated from seeds or divided rootstock (which appears as a bulb or corm), the plants are easy! After blooms fade, I like to cut the flower stems for neater appearance.



Echinacea tennesseensis

Native to the Metro Nashville area, this Echinacea species is rare, but not impossible to find. A delightful little flower worth locating.



Liatris spicata

Easily and inexpensively obtained, this wildflower attracts butterflies as seen above with two visiting buckeyes (*Junonia coenia*). Named selections exist, but the species is quite charming.

- *Lonicera sempervirens* ‘Blanche Sandman’
(Trumpet honeysuckle ‘Blanche Sandman’) Named after the Louisville resident who first propagated this selection and shared among her neighbors and friends, this native honeysuckle is a much tamer version of *Lonicera* and worth tracking down as opposed to its invasive Asian cousin, *Lonicera japonica*. Quite content growing on a trellis or arbor, growing around ten feet, this vine is blanketed profusely in deep rose flowers that open to yellow. Blooms heavily in May and June, then on and off again until frost. Attracts hummingbirds. Best planted in organically rich well-drained soils in full sun, although it can stand some dappled shade. The subject of my May 2018 article in *The American Gardener*, this plant was introduced to the commercial market by Allen Bush, formerly of Holbrook Farm Nursery in Fletcher, North Carolina.



Lonicera sempervirens ‘Blanche Sandman’

- *Narcissus* ‘Kokopelli’
(Daffodil ‘Kokopelli’) An introduction from my friend, Bob Spotts, in California, this daffodil has grown in popularity over the years. Now grown commercially by the Dutch, it is no longer limited in availability or confined to specialty catalogues at \$10-15 per bulb. Grown by daffodil exhibitors all around the world. A controversial show flower, I have become reluctant to exhibit this flower, even though the flowers are consistently show quality. In some locales it reaches standard size, too large to exhibit as a miniature. In the South, it appears as a miniature, but because it is a standard elsewhere it is not listed on the American Daffodil Society’s official miniatures list. Some dubious language in the judges’ handbook has prompted some to argue that it can be shown as a miniature where it appears as a miniature, but MAJOR disagreements have erupted. So, to avoid making my fellow exhibitors/judges mad at me, I usually leave ‘Kokopelli’ at home during show season. That said, it is absolutely wonderful in the garden. A jonquil (more specifically, an apodanthi-type daffodil), it is delightfully fragrant. Its stems have one to four florets. Mine usually present two. It is a low grower..about one

foot in height. All around, a hard-to-fault daffodil. Perfect for small spaces, containers and rock gardens.

- *Vaccinium corymbosum* 'Sunshine Blue' (Blueberry 'Sunshine Blue') Requiring only 150 "chill hours," this blueberry performs well in my garden, offering year-round interest. Its berries are of

good size, its summer foliage is distinctly different from any other plants/shrubs in the garden and the autumn color is intense and much underrated. Growing four feet or so in height in my garden, this blueberry seems to really enjoy the American South. My plant has endured its share of dry summers, intense humidity and winter cold. And, best of all, I am rewarded with more berries than I can eat. I get my blueberry corn muffin fix once a year (See SouthernEdition.com for a popular Tennessee restaurant's recipe). And I



Narcissus 'Kokopelli'



share the remaining berries with the songbirds, who reward me with their pleasant sounds and cheerful disposition.



Vaccinium corymbosum 'Sunshine Blue'
(Blueberry 'Sunshine Blue')



- *Wisteria frutescens* 'Amethyst Falls'
(Wisteria 'Amethyst Falls')
An introduction from my neighbor, Bill Head (Head Ornamentals), this wisteria is a selection of our native *Wisteria frutescens*, and is noninvasive and far from out-of-control like its Chinese cousin, *Wisteria sinensis*. From June to August, it boasts beautiful 4-6" clusters of lavender-blue flowers. It is easily maintained in compact form or confined to a



Wisteria frutescens 'Amethyst Falls'
(Photo: Head Ornamentals)

mailbox, for instance. Very suitable for small spaces. Fragrant, although its scent is not appealing to everyone.