

2012 Florida Garden Select Plants

The Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association (FNGLA) announced the Florida Garden Select Plants for 2012. A jury of growers, horticulturists, retailers, landscape professionals and University of Florida faculty members select these plants each year, which are deemed superior for Florida's environment. Note that some of the plants are listed for zones south of our area. Okaloosa County is in USDA Plant Hardiness Zone 8.

Beach Sunflower, *Helianthus debilis*, is a native groundcover that grows in Hardiness Zones 8-11. It's best used in coastal landscapes. It's drought and salt tolerant and thrives in full sun. This spreading perennial produces small yellow sunflower-like blooms much of the year. Here in North Florida, the plants usually die back in winter and regrow in spring.

Drift Series Rose, *Rosa x 'Drift' series*, will grow in Hardiness Zones 5-10. This miniature shrub rose grows 18-20 inches in height with a 2-3 foot spread. Used as a groundcover or in containers, this series is disease and drought tolerant and produces small flowers repeatedly.

Mule Palm, *x Butiagrus naborlandii*, is a hybrid made by crossing the cold-hardy pindo palm with the more tropical queen palm. The result is a cold-hardy palm with a tropical feel that grows in Hardiness Zones 8-11. It is salt tolerant but needs good drainage.

Pond Cypress, *Taxodium ascendens*, is an underused native tree that looks very similar to the bald cypress. Despite its name, it has surprising drought tolerance once established. Another surprise is that it drops its needle-like leaves during the fall. But come spring, it produces light feathery foliage. It grows in Hardiness Zones 5-10.

Rosemary, *Rosmarinus officinalis*, has fragrant, edible foliage and grows in Hardiness Zones 8-11. This short-lived perennial blooms profusely in full sun with the more common bluish purple flowers. But white to pink flowers are seen on some selections. Its form is an informal mound reaching a height of about one foot with equal spread.

Slender Weaver's Bamboo, *Bambusa textilis var. gracilis*, is a clumping, low maintenance bamboo described as having a small footprint even at maturity. This graceful, fast growing bamboo grows 20 to 30 feet in height in Hardiness Zones 8-11.

Sun Parasol Mandevilla, *Mandevilla x 'Sun Parasol' series*, is a tropical, cold-tender perennial vine that is recommended for Hardiness Zones 10-11. Even though it may function as an annual in North Florida, it's worth the long bloom cycles of pink flowers during spring, summer and fall.

You can review these plants at the FNGLA website under the Community Programs tab (<http://www.fn gla.org>).

Larry Williams, UF/IFAS Extension Agent, Okaloosa County, December 26, 2011