

Stalwarts for Summer

SEPT 1999 by Joan Sargent

Two drought and sun loving plants, one from Japan and one from China, that came through the worst conditions with no trouble are Indigofera and Lespedeza.

Both members of the Pea family, they are not flashy plants. They work as well in the perennial border as with shrubs and small hedges. They are die-back plants and you would treat them as you would Caryopteris or Perovskia, cutting them back hard in early spring.

The mimosa-like foliage of [Chinese] Indigofera [Indigofera tinctoria] is invaluable and rare in the garden. Soft blue-green leaves and almost fern-like. The shrubs grow to 4 feet tall and about as wide, it is not invasive but you will find the occasional seedling. The rosy purple flowers may not be your favorite color but the butterflies and bees appreciate them and it blooms all summer. This plant needs no watering, dead-heading, feeding or mulching and looks as great in May as in October. For some reason is not easy to find, but one of my mail order nurseries, Fairweather Gardens, in Greenwich, NJ carries it. It should be planted in the spring.

Lespedeza [thunbergii], the [Japanese] bush clover, is much easier to find. Olivers in Fairfield, and Twombly's in Monroe have several varieties, again I think spring planting is advised. This shrub carries arching branches of thin leaves, slightly on the silvery side. It will grow to 4 feet in one summer. The branches are clothed in late summer with small pea shaped flowers.

A new variety 'Edo Shibori' has pink and white flowers. This is a see-through plant and looks well in front or behind Japanese Anemones that bloom at about the same time. There are several with variegated leaves that I would like to try. If you can't water, these two plants won't let you down and my deer herd ignores them.

Joan Sargent, a longtime member and master gardener who passed away in August 2012; wrote about 24 gardening columns through the years for our newsletter. We are reprinting them again.



Clockwise from top right:

- Chinese Indigofera,
Indigofera tinctoria
- Lespedeza thunbergii,
Japanaese Bush Clover,
blooms in Aug and Sept.
- Close up of the
Lespedeza bicolor
- Close up of L. 'Gibraltar'

