

## Can't Judge a Plant by its Cover

We consult the catalog and the plant encyclopedia but still the plants surprise us

### **I. It's like books!**

- A. Effective lures: Oh, that cover photo!
- B. Enticing appeals to basic dreams: Secrets and miracles promised!
- C. Promising exactly what each person is looking for: 'simple and universal.'
- D. Roping us in for more: "Wait a minute... it's just one of a series?!"

### **II. How it's done with plants**

- A. The promo photo promised...
  - 1. "Blooms all summer"
    - But the truth is seasonal
  - 2. Permanence, no need to plant every year
    - Yet they're living things with needs and even a long life has limits
- B. Thought you bought the plant right for everyone, everywhere...
  - 1. Promised fool proof: "Anyone can grow it!"
    - a) But it's fussy, particular... and can we call a plant a wimp?
    - b) To the ruination of personal self esteem!
  - 2. Said "Grows anywhere!"
    - Plants fit niches: "Right plant, right place"
- C. Such a thrill: Says it's dwarf and compact for our finite spaces
  - Hmmm. Lots of leeway in the term "dwarf"
- D. Big selling point is that it grows fast, covers ground, naturalizes
  - a) Wait for it: Invasive, aggressive
  - b) Sometimes with strings attached: Wildlife host, toxin

### **III. Our savvy selections that really deliver**

- A. For a long season  
kousa, sargent viburnum, butterfly bush, golden bleeding heart  
(fringed bleeding heart)
- B. Long life  
white oak, panicle hydrangea, peony, hibiscus, goatsbeard
- C. Easy and adaptable  
tree lilac, potentilla, tall sedum, coreopsis, hosta
- D. Dwarf by *our* yardstick  
paperbark maple, spirea, big betony, foamflower
- E. Fast, non-invasive groundcover  
bigroot geranium, creeping sedum
- F. Natural, with enjoyable strings  
serviceberry, redbud, swamp milkweed, columbine

**A closer look at the plant selections, and room to nominate more:**

**For a long season of interest**

kousa: (*Cornus kousa*) Chinese dogwood tree

sargent viburnum (*Viburnum sargentii*)

butterfly bush (*Buddleia davidii*)

golden bleeding heart (*Corydalis lutea*) (fringed bleeding heart, *Dicentra eximia*)

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**For a long life with minimal care**

white oak, swamp white oak, burr oak (*Quercus alba*, *Q. bicolor*, *Q. macrocarpa*)

panicle hydrangea (*Hydrangea paniculata*)

peony (*Paeonia*, especially intersectional hybrids)

hardy hibiscus (*H. moscheutos* hybrids)

goatsbeard (*Aruncus dioicus*)

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**Easy and adaptable**

tree lilac (*Syringa reticulata*)

potentilla (*Potentilla fruticosa* varieties)

tall sedum (*Hylotelephium*, *Sedum spectabile*)

lanceleaf coreopsis (*C. lanceolata*)

hosta (*Hosta* varieties)

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**Dwarf by our yardstick**

paperbark maple (*Acer griseum*)

dwarf spireas (*Spiraea x bumalda*, *S. japonica*)

big betony (*Stachys micrantha*)

foamflower (*Tiarella cordifolia* varieties)

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**Fast, non-invasive (controllable) groundcover**

bigroot perennial geranium (*Geranium macrorrhizum*)

creeping sedum (*Sedum* spp. *S. spurium*, *S. kamschaticum*, etc.)

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**Natural, with enjoyable "strings" attached**

serviceberry (*Amelanchier Canadensis*)

red twig (*Cornus alba*, *C. service* varieties)

swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incana*)

columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*)

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