

More and Better Monardas

The Avant Gardener, May 2006

Gardeners as well as bees, butterflies and humming birds place monardas high on their lists of esteemed North American native perennials. For bright all-summer color on a variety of plant sizes, bee balms (*M. didyma*) and bergamots (*M. fistulosa*) are deservedly considered staples for borders and naturalistic plantings in zones 4 to 8.

Monardas need ample moisture, and they benefit from some afternoon shade in the South. Deadheading will prolong bloom into autumn. Most monardas spread by their roots, but excess sections are easily dug out, in effect dividing the plants, in spring.

The worst problem is powdery mildew, and some of the most popular cultivars such as 'Beauty of Cobham' and 'Croftway Pink' have their foliage routinely and severely disfigured by this disease. In tests by the Chicago Botanic Garden, these were rated highest for mildew resistance as well as general performance: 'Blue Wreath', 'Colrain Red', 'Falls of Hill's Creek', 'Gardenview Scarlet', 'Marshall's Delight', 'Ohio Glow', 'Raspberry Wine', 'Rose Queen', 'Rosy Purple' and 'Violet Queen'. The newer 15" lavender-pink 'Petite Delight' and 4' brilliant red 'Jacob Cline' are also being hailed for mildew resistance.

Some uncommon species of *Monarda* are coming into cultivation. The 2' *M. bradburyana* bears broad heads of purple-spotted pink flowers. Also unusual is the 2' *M. punctata*, its brown-spotted yellow flowers surrounded by large white bracts.