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The Drought-Resistant Garden

Atlanta landscape architect William T. Smith offers his top five tips for coping with dry times

In the last few years, the South has experienced long periods of drought, leading to water rations and outright watering bans. Atlanta landscape architect William T. Smith offers suggestions for gardeners who are struggling in these dry times.

1. Rely on perennials and bulbs during times of drought. Neither of Elizabeth Holt's two woodland gardens (see the March/April 2009 issue of Southern Accents) contains annuals.
2. Keep it simple. Match the plant to the location in the garden. Choose plants that are likely to thrive under specific conditions. Learn whether a plant prefers shade or sun, dry ground or wet, and you will never make the mistake of planting the wrong plant in the wrong place.
3. Realize you are going to have changes in growing conditions from season to season and year to year. Plan ahead. Some perennials are tough as nails and can survive better than others. Good choices are false indigo, stokesia, gaura, dusty miller, coneflowers, goldenrods, daylilies, Siberian irises, patrinia, and lupines.
4. You can get an incredible bounty of flowers from woody shrubs such as clethra, fothergilla, sweetspire, viburnum, chaste trees, spiraea, weigela, bluebeard, fringe trees, deutzia, quince, and mock orange. If you drive out in the countryside, you will see huge, old bushes that have stood the test of time with absolutely no care.
5. Every lawn will need some water at some time, but consider using mondo grass. Once established, it is drought-resistant.

Source: William T. Smith, William T. Smith & Associates, Landscape Architects, 404/255-6786.
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