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COLUMNS

Campbell Vaughn: Check out these hearty plants for your lawns; and beware pine straw scams

Campbell Vaughn Columnist

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I am guessing you know that I love plants. When people are out and about, I assume they are looking around at different types of cars or signs or houses, while I am looking at plants.

I love the variety of shapes, sizes, colors and textures of plants. I'm a plant nerd for sure.

When I see plants, I think, "I like that one. Where can I fit it in my landscape?" I have noted a couple of plants that I wanted to highlight that I have paid a little extra attention to this past week. One is a foundation shrub and the other is a bulb.

My wife and I finished an addition to our house a few years ago and anytime you are nearing the end of a construction project, you are broke. After grading the yard and getting a bunch of sod down, I needed some reasonably priced plants to do some massing around the perimeter of the house. I put the corner plants in and needed to fill some larger stretches with bigger groupings.

At local nurseries, I found some 3-gallon Blue Cascade Distylium. Over all the years of installing thousands of plants, this was the first time I have used this shrub. It has done unbelievably well.

They were installed in March 2020 and survived Covid and no issues with the summer heat the first year. With the brutal Christmas cold of 2022, they didn't burn at all when other plants were getting knocked to the ground.

I purposely don't fertilize them much because they grow no matter what. In these terrible heat and drought days this summer, they never drooped once.

There are multiple varieties of distylium, but the Blue Cascade is the one I chose. The leaves are medium sized and more elongated. The shrub is compact and dense but also layered, making the plant more spreading than upright. It has a lot looser feel than something like a manicured boxwood or holly. It seems to handle full sun just as well as partial sun.

Although it is more known for the evergreen foliage, this distylium actually has a subtle bloom of maroon flowers in late winter. This variety of distylium is listed at about 3 feet tall and 4 feet wide. You can add about another foot to the top and bottom. Selective pruning is easy, and I have only had to do light pruning once in four years.

The other plant I wanted to discuss was from a picture that one of our Richmond County Extension family members sent. What was odd from the picture was this mass of blooming yellow bulbs in the middle of the hot summer. They were Yellow Rain Lilies (*Zephyranthes citrina*).

Campbell Vaughn: Now is the time to divide perennials. Follow these steps.

The yellow rain lily is native to Mexico and grow well in the South. They seem to love the heat and are activated to bloom by the late summer rains. Not sure you noticed, but we had some rain this week.

If you can find some of these bulbs, plant them two to three times the depth of the bulb in well-drained soil and you will have a yard full of them as they multiply. There are other varieties of them that come in lavender, pink and cream.

One last thing I wanted to mention is pine straw. I love pine straw and use it as a cover in my own yard. It is big business around the Southeast. I also know that there are reputable hard-working people that are in the pine straw business. There are also people who are out to strongarm and scam people into buying a little pine straw for a lot of money.

These scammers will ride up to your house in a beat-up truck with a trailer of straw and tell you they will put out 30 or 40 bales for a reasonable fee. After they put out half of what they said they were going to, they will come back to you with a bill for something exorbitant. I have heard of these swindlers charging as much as \$2,500.

They prey on senior citizens. If a random pine straw salesman rings your doorbell and you don't know who they are, ask to see their business license. If they can't show you one, ask them to leave. If they do have a license and you want their straw, make sure they lay out all

the straw they are going to sell you so you can count the bales and ask what the final total is going to be. Get the total in writing.

Take pictures of the truck and straw laid out in your yard. When they try and add fees, offer to pay what is in writing. If they get aggressive, go inside and call the police and let the legal system help sort it out.