

Brazilian Firecracker One Hot Summer Vine

BY NORMAN WINTER
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Whether in the landscape, or in containers on the porch patio or deck we can never underestimate the artistry of growing up or vertical. We all look for plants that give us a lengthy bloom period and one of the best is the Brazilian firecracker vine, known botanically as *Manettia cordifolia*.

It is native to Paraguay and Uruguay and related to the gardenia and ixora. This tropical does offer some good cold hardiness to zone 7 though winters like we just experienced we may it needing a little extra protection. What I like about it the vine is its small glossy leaves giving a delicate look yet it loads up with a bounty of flowers that until frost in the fall.

This vine has the ability to climb on its own without a lot of tedious training from the home gardener. It has just the right amount of vigor to cover a Victorian style tower or reach the top of an 8 foot white lattice fence without fears of it becoming a kudzu-like plant.

As I drive through the southern United States it becomes apparent this plant has found favor as you can find miles of fence row where the vine has found a home returning faithful.

To grow yours select a site in full to part sun and plant in fertile well drained soil. This drainage will be crucial to allow it to return in the spring. Cold wet winter soil will most likely prove fatal. Don't forget to provide its support structure.

It is this diminutive size that allows it to be grown in a container with a small trellis and

then brought indoors for the winter. You'll want to cut back to make it more manageable. Unless you have an atrium like setting or bright sunroom your goal will be to more or less hold the plant over until warm weather arrives in the spring. Water only when dry to the touch.

In the landscape the vine will die back in colder areas. Once froze you'll want cut back and tidy up and add a layer of mulch for added winter protection.

Those of you who love gardening for hummingbirds will find this to be a real favorite. The red tubular flowers seem to be just the right "nectar of the day" for these visiting acrobats.

The Brazilian firecracker vine will fit in just about any landscape style, from the backyard wildlife habitat, to grandma's cottage garden to your corner of tropical paradise.

If you are fortunate enough to have white columns on the porch or patio the Brazilian firecracker vine could be just what you need. A tower, white lattice fence, or even rustic fence post will be just about perfect.

In the tropical style garden combine with yellow cannas or yellow shrimp plants two other great choices for hummingbirds. In the cottage garden or backyard habitat try partnering them with blue forms of salvias like the blue anise sage or the indigo spires.

If you are not doing so already make 2010 the year you start growing up with vines. The Brazilian firecracker will give you not only that vertical element, but loads of bright red flowers and more hummingbirds than you can imagine.

HOMEGARDEN Big Business For Backyard Farming

BY P.J. HUFFSTUTTER
© 2010, Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — Ignoring his aching back, Todd Lininger squatted down on his knees and inched his way around the vegetable field.

The yields were up on three arugula plants. A snail crawled in the row of lettuce. And it looked like the onions might be ready for that night's dinner.

All in all, not a bad harvest — considering that these crops were growing in a Lilliputian backyard plot in a Claremont, Calif., cul-de-sac. Lininger calls himself a farmer, though he doesn't ride a John Deere and never sees a sun set over the fields. Instead, he tends a succession of peewee suburban plots as if they were the sprawling ranches of California's Central Valley.

"The sign of success used to be who had the best lawn," said Lininger, 41, as he pinched the dead leaves of the plot's lone beet. "Now, it's all about how much food you can grow."

Homeowners who want fresh cucumbers and heirloom tomatoes but don't have time to grow their own hire Lininger's company, Farmscape, to do the work for them. But don't call him a gardener: It's more like farming by the foot. And the 6-foot-4 ex-Marine, skinny as a snap bean, says he can barely keep up with demand.

There's a mini-boom in such mini farms. Scores of businesses like Farmscape are sprouting up nationwide, from My Backyard Farm in San Clemente, Calif., to Your Backyard Farmer in Portland, Ore., and Freelance Farmers in New Haven, Conn.

Many of these small businesses have emerged because of the country's sluggish economy, as people who hunt for work are marketing themselves as urban farmers and catering to a clientele hungry for a cornucopia without the sweat.

Some of these microfarmers were landscapers looking to expand, said Lisa Munniksma, managing editor of Urban Farm magazine. Others were fledgling entrepreneurs seeking a niche in



Todd Lininger of Farmscape plants a seedling in a client's yard in Claremont, Calif. The service isn't cheap, but business is booming.

the green economy.

On average, the companies charge between \$900 and \$2,000 to have a section of land dug up — or to build a raised bed — that's big enough to grow enough edible plants to feed a family of four.

The companies also offer personalized planting and harvesting services. For an additional weekly fee of \$20 or more, a staff member will put in the plants, pluck the weeds, amend the soil, quash the bugs and fill a basket with ripened produce.

Yet the price tag hasn't cooled consumer appetites. Batya Kagan, who launched Your Backyard Bounty about a year ago, has found herself spending as much time nurturing customers' squash and radicchio as she does at her own modest vegetable farm in Santa Cruz County, Calif.

The two-person staff at Your Backyard Farmer is so over-

whelmed with maintaining their 67 mini-fields, they're turning people away. Co-founder Donna Smith started a waiting list earlier this month for those willing to spend at least \$1,675 a year to turn 400 square feet into rows of butternut squash, bok choy or kale.

So far, 15 people have clamored to get on the list. Kae Yates, 65, said Lininger's fee to plant four garden plots at her Claremont home — \$2,400 — was well worth it.

"I don't have the time or the physical ability to do this myself," she said. "They do all the labor and I get to reap all the rewards."

Along with fresh produce, those rewards can include the bragging rights that come with having the latest eco-conscious status symbol: a farmer to call your own.

"The reality is, in most cases, you can go to Safeway or Whole

Foods and buy organic produce for less," said Jeremy Oldfield, 27, co-founder of Freelance Farmers. "So we focus on the intangibles of this: the joy of picking a tomato in the afternoon that's still warm from the sun, or having a dinner party and being able to point out to your guests that most of the meal came out of your backyard."

Interest in backyard produce blossomed along with the recession, which spurred many people to try their hand at planting vegetables.

Home Depot saw its vegetable seed sales jump 30 percent last year and continued to have double-digit growth in January. George Ball, chief executive of W. Atlee Burpee & Co., North America's largest home garden company, said that for the last few years the company has been selling more vegetable seeds and plants than flowers — for the first time in its 130-year history.

Planting New Life In Detroit's Blighted Neighborhoods

BY JEFF SEIDEL
© 2010, Detroit Free Press

DETROIT — Edith Floyd stands in her garden — a small pocket of life in a neighborhood that died long ago on the east side of Detroit — and the birds are chirping, and the sun is warm and strong. A butterfly flutters over a patch of dandelions. Soon, the ground will be covered with cucumbers and peppers and watermelons.

The dirt smells fresh and rich, like farm country, somewhere far away; and then, suddenly, a siren goes off, piercing the serenity like a poke in the heart, and an ambulance comes screaming down Van Dyke. Cars are whizzing by, and somebody is yelling, and a dog is barking over by the empty lot where punks dump stolen cars.

Across the street, a van stops in front of an abandoned house on Mt. Olivet. Two men get out and walk inside. Floyd watches intently. There is nothing left to steal from that old house. It's an empty shell from another time, back when cars were driving the economy.

The windows are shattered. The front door hangs off its hinges. The ceiling has crumbled onto the floor, and most of the home's innards have been stolen: the toilet and cabinet doors and electrical wires.

"Watcha doing?" Floyd screams.

She can remember a time when this block had 65 houses. Now, only six homes have people living in them. Many of the houses burned down or were just left behind when the auto jobs started disappearing. Some of the houses were torn down, leaving wide swaths of land big enough to put down a football field.

One of the men has a clipboard and looks official. "Hey, you gonna tear that down?" Floyd asks.

"Yes," the man says. He says he is checking houses for asbestos before they're demolished. It is part of Detroit Mayor Dave Bing's efforts to tear down this year 3,000 houses that the city deems dangerous.

"Oooh," she says. "Thank God."

"There's five of them on this street," the man yells. "In four to six weeks."

"Good!" It will give her more land to farm. Floyd, 61, is an opportunist, a master of working the system and getting things for free.

And she has started a garden that keeps on growing. She farms about a half acre on several empty lots she adopted from the city, and she recently received permission to plant on more land across the street from her home.



Edith Floyd pulls weeds out of a bed in the Growing Joy Garden she created in her neighborhood in Detroit on April 14, 2010.

City leaders call it urban farming.

Floyd calls it a passion. She looks at empty plots and sees potential and possibility. Floyd's neighborhood is like many in Detroit. Some have estimated that there are 70,000 vacant homes. But Floyd doesn't see blight. She sees future farmland.

While politicians debate the concept of urban farming — Should zoning laws be changed? Who should be allowed to farm? Is this a viable option for Detroit's vacant land? — Floyd has quietly worked behind the scenes, making it happen on a small scale. One seed after another.

Soon, she will plant her peppers and cucumbers and garlic. "Once you eat garlic out of this garden, you won't want to eat dried up garlic from the store anymore," she says.

200 LITTLE PINE TREES

Floyd started her garden about 20 years ago on a vacant lot that used to be a dumping ground for tires. She cleaned up the tires and planted 200 little pine trees. That fall, the city mowed the grass and accidental-

ly cut down all the trees.

"My children cried, and I was like, 'Oh my God,'" says Floyd, who has lived in this neighborhood for more than 40 years, raising four kids with her husband, William, 71.

The next year, she got a second lot through the adoption program.

Which turned into a third lot. And now, she is about to expand across Mt. Olivet.

Over the years, she has planted squash, peas, corn, tomatoes, spinach, watermelon, cantaloupe, cucumbers and peppers.

"I love it!" Floyd says. "I love to put the little seed in, and the

seed grows up, and that's the best feeling."

She eats most of the food, but she also gives away some of it to soup kitchens. Last year, she sold about 90 watermelons at Eastern Market.

Floyd works in the garden every day, pulling weeds, but she also gets help from neighbors, schoolchildren and volunteers who have to perform court-ordered community service. People often stop by and ask if they can eat something from her garden. "Yeah, but you gotta work an hour to work it off," she tells them.

"Some people don't want it. They think it's free for all, and I

guesses that she has received 20 grants in the last 30 years, ranging from private individuals to a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Her plans are grandiose. She hopes to put up a 30-by-72-foot high-tunnel structure similar to a greenhouse thanks to a \$5,000 grant from the USDA. "It's a grant to show me how to grow sustainable food year-round," she says. "It won't have electricity. The sun will heat it, and I will have to build it myself."

And she is taking a class to learn how to handle bees. She plans to put up a bee hive and build a chicken coop.

When her garden is planted, she hopes to work on new land across Mt. Olivet. "I want the whole block," she says.

And that will be easier when those five vacant houses are torn down.

She already can imagine what it will look like: One lot will be collard greens; the next, cabbage; the next one will be full of onions, and the next lot will have some fruit trees.

She wants to plant two peach trees, two pear trees, two plum trees and two apple trees.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Ava Tinsley sits in the garden, supervising two people who were ordered to do community service — one for driving without a license; the other was busted with narcotics.

"Edith Floyd called and said she needed help, and we supplied the labor," says Tinsley, a community liaison to the Department of Corrections via Woodward Avenue Restoration District, a nonprofit organization. "She's a wonderful woman. I can't wait until she gets some cows and chickens."

Tinsley says her program helps out at several community gardens like Floyd's.

"This isn't a tiny step, it's a major step in the right direction," Tinsley says. "Not only are we helping to improve, we are teaching a trade. They now know gardening; we are going to end up feeding thousands of people with this vegetation."

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