

Garden Talk

Top 10 Indestructible Plants, Go Ahead I Dare You!

“Where People Who Love to Garden, Love to Shop”™

by Ken Lain, the mountain gardener

Every garden needs a few plants that can handle whatever abuse we throw their way. That’s not to say we should be needlessly tough on them, but let’s face it, there are places in the garden that are less than ideal conditions, times when we just don’t have the time or energy to water, and years when the weather mocks gardeners despite all our efforts. For those and so many more times when our gardens must rise to the challenge, here are some (almost) indestructible plants.

1. Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia*) grabs hold of soil and takes whatever it needs from it. It’s really pretty amazing how much it can flower on so little care and feeding. The big, yellow, daisy-shaped flowers are as perfect for bouquets as they are for tempting butterflies. If you like birds to hang out in the yard, this perennial is an important winter bird food source.

2. Balboa Sunset Trumpet Creeper (*Campsis radicans*) is covered through summer with large clusters of 3-4” wide dark red flowers so stunning they’re like candy to gardeners. This lighting-fast growing vine can quickly cloak shade arbors, entwine up posts or columns, and cover overhead trellises at entries and gateways. Allowed to sprawl up bare hillsides, walls, rooftops, and cascade down retaining walls it will bloom in summer’s heat. It’s one of the best vines for masking old unattractive fences and outbuildings, and to hold open soil in place during the heaviest monsoon rains. Hummingbirds find the fragrance irresistible and do people.

3. Coneflower (*Echinacea*) If you have a sunny spot that needs planting, there are lots of reasons to grow a purple coneflower. Butterflies of many varieties love sipping its nectar. It is very heat and drought tolerant, and because it blooms all summer long it’s the perfect addition to a cutting garden. If you want an unflappable plant for poor soil and full sun, here’s a winner.



4. Daylily (*Hemerocallis*) It wasn’t so long ago that daylilies were the darlings of the plant world. Every year saw the introduction of hundreds of new cultivars, all hoping to be the next Stella d’Oro. These days many gardeners want to replace them with the next new thing. Before you lift your spade, consider why they became popular in the first place. Nothing phases this plant. Daylilies can handle drought, flood, and neglect. If you have a hot, sunny bed where nothing is happy, give daylilies a try. There are way more colors to choose from than your grandmother ever knew.

5. Petite Indigo Butterfly Bush (*Buddleia davidii*) It’s known as the summer blooming lilac because its spectacular, fragrant, cone-shaped flowers resemble lilac blossoms. Scores of butterflies frequent the nectar-filled flowers. Easy to grow in tight spaces, this 5-footer is perfect as an accent or border planting and to grow in containers.

6. Pincushion Flower (*Scabiosa*) Purple, purple, and more shades of purple. This is one of my favorites of the low-growing flowers that love sun and heat. I like to plant it towards the front of the garden and watch as each plant produces dozens of flowers all summer. Expect butterflies; they love these pincushions!

7. Sedum are succulents, so they don’t need supplemental water. Their thick, juicy stems shoot up early in the spring and remain attractive all season. When it’s time to cut them back, there’s already new growth at their bases. This plant can’t wait until spring to emerge; it gets a head start in late fall and bides its time through winter. Come spring many have the brightest, cactus-like flowers. Small varieties of this undemanding plant are perfect in that tiny planter on the back patio in the blistering heat

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8. Brake Light *Yucca*

(*Hesperaloe*) Now, now, don't turn up your nose at this gardener's workhorse. *Yucca* doesn't get a lot of respect in the gardening world until you get to Arizona. Those spiky leaves fend off intruders and the long taproot anchors it deep in the soil and makes moving it (or killing it) very difficult indeed. If the common species is too coarse for you, try one of the variegated varieties. They're almost as tough, just as architecturally satisfying, and deliver a long season of color. This new brake light red series is the only true red, and stays below knee high for truly low maintenance. Talk about a [xeric plant!](#)



Remember, I said these plants can handle abuse, but that doesn't mean they like it. Use these plants in tough areas of the garden, but show them some TLC whenever you can.

9. **Hot Lips Sage** – (*Salvia Greggii*) is a specific group of plants guaranteed to thrive in our hot climate. Garden trials have shown it to be a fast, vigorous grower with excellent heat tolerance for those brutal hot spots in Arizona's mountain landscapes. It is an ever-blooming hybrid with a stunning profusion of fluorescent raspberry-red flowers held well above its arching branches. Growing just past knee height, its deep green perennial foliage has a sweet herbal fragrance.

10. **Mexican Primrose** (*Oenothera speciosa*) is actually a weed with profuse pink flowers the size of silver dollars. Just don't plant it in the middle of your garden or this low ground cover will take over and choke out any other plants. I put this one out in the dry edges of my gardens, and abuse it. The worse treatment it gets, the better a primrose blooms. Tromp on it, mow it, and forget to water this perennial for summer-long color. Tough, tough, tough! Plant a purple Russian Sage in the middle of this pink carpet for a designer's delight that is low, low care.

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