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## Gomphrena offers beauty coupled with summer long endurance

**By Norman Winter**

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When the heat settles in like it has in the southeast there is one plant that comes to mind for beauty coupled with perseverance and that is the gomphrena. This little plant often overlooked in the marketplace will be the one catching your eye in the landscape when the showier competitors have long succumbed to the staggering temperatures.

If the word gomphrena doesn't ring a bell then perhaps the name globe amaranth will stir the memory. It is sometimes referred to as bachelor's button but that might lead you to a little confusion with others by that common name.

Botanically speaking most of the ones at your garden center are known as *Gomphrena globosa* and are native to Central America. But there are new species and hybrids that are showing up that are equally tough and resilient in summer's onslaught of staggering temperatures.

Because they so tough, you can feel at ease planting them now, even though the heat index in much of the country is regularly hitting triple digits. Select a site in full sun with fertile, well-drained soil. I have seen many fine ones in part sun, but blooms are more prolific in full sun.

When working your soil, incorporate 2 pounds of fertilizer per 100 square feet of bed space. I use a 12-6-6 ratio, but a balanced one that contains a slow-release form of nitrogen will do just fine. Work the fertilizer and 3 to 4 inches of organic matter, and till 6 to 8 inches.

Space plants 6 inches apart for the dwarf varieties like the Gnome series and at least 12 inches apart for the taller selections like the award winning All Around Purple and the new Las Vegas series that comes in three colors. Plant them at the same depth they are growing in the container.

Then there is the spectacular new Fireworks, a variety that can reach 4 feet tall and produce scores of iridescent hot pink flowers. With this selection give them more room, with spacing from 24 to 36 inches. This one too is an award winner and found at the top of most trials.

These are nearly maintenance-free plants — remove old flowers as needed to keep the plant tidy and looking its best, as well as to keep those little, round flowers coming. Feed plants about every six weeks with the same fertilizer you used in bed preparation.

The gomphrena is an excellent cut flower for the vase, as well as dried and used for winter arrangements. The little ball-shaped flowers also are ideal for adding to potpourri dishes.

The purple selections partner well with yellow flowers like lantana, marigolds, melampodium and rudbeckia and orange flowers like the Profusion Fire zinnia. They also look great with Diamond Frost euphorbia — the little plant with hundreds of tiny white flowers.

Pink varieties look blissfully wonderful with the spiky blue blooms of *Salvia farinacea*, like Victoria Blue, Velocity Blue or the taller indigo spires selection Mystic Spires Blue. All varieties will partner well with lime green coleus like Electric Lime or Wild Lime that provide color and texture via their gaudy foliage.

There are still months of hot weather headed for your landscape but by planting tough gomphrena this weekend your beds will be showy and you'll look like the neighborhood garden guru.

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