



HOW TO BEAT EXTREME WEATHER CONDITIONS? 'EXTREME PLANTS'

Garden experts list weather-proof plants that save time, money

May 1, 2013 – As you're planning and planting your garden this year, you'll want plants that can stand up to weather extremes.

After all, last year was the warmest on record in the United States, according to a 2012 report by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). "It was also the second most extreme, meaning that there were several periods of prolonged wetness in addition to crushing droughts," said Rochester, NY's Jane Milliman, publisher of the *Upstate Gardeners' Journal*.

It looks like more extreme weather is on the way in 2013, too. This March was the driest in 47 years and the fifth driest on record, according to an April 15 report by the National Climatic Data Center. And the National Weather service also predicts persistent drought for most of the country, while the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration forecasts spring flooding in the Midwest and Southeast.

Some plants, however, refuse to be taken down by Mother Nature – you could call them the 'ultimate fighters' of the horticulture world. So for each of the following extreme weather conditions, garden pros list some go-to plants.

Saltwater flooding/salt damage

"Storms like Hurricane Isabel in 2003, Sandy in 2012 and numerous tidal-flooding northeasters have given me considerable hands-on experience with salt-tolerant plants," said Chesapeake Bay, Virginia-based garden writer Kathy Hogan Van Mullekom.

Her favorites include Flower Carpet[®] roses, native wax myrtle, salt bushes, ornamental grasses, gardenias and bulbs. She also recommends big-leaf hydrangeas, rugosa roses, India and yedda hawthorn, osmanthus, bald cypress, Japanese black pine, Eastern red cedar, Hollywood juniper, live oak, yaupon holly and salt cedar.

"The saving grace is most storms include rain, which naturally washes the plants and the soil around them, reducing the salinity in the ground," said Van Mullekom.

When it comes to resisting the corrosive effects of salt spray, Van Mullekom recommends hydrangeas, rugosa roses and ornamental grasses. As for the ice-melting road salt used in colder areas, she says thick-leaved plants fare the best, but you should still rinse the ice and salt off any affected plant and saturate the surrounding soil with fresh water.

Drought

Van Mullekom, whose area also got parched by dryness last summer, vouches for the following drought-tolerant plants: milkweed, sedums, camellias (once established, if you live within their cold-hardy zones), nandinas, herbs, *Verbena bonariensis*, coneflowers, lantana, butterfly weed and ornamental grasses.

Flower Carpet groundcover roses also got high marks for heat and drought tolerance from Tesselaar Plants' home testers this past summer:

"Even though we had temperatures of 113 degrees for several days, and no rain, all I did was water them very well once a week, and they performed beautifully," reported Carrie Glenn of Howe, Oklahoma (Zone 6b).

"They were very vigorous and drought-tolerant – way more than all my other roses," said Catie Anderson of McMinnville, Oregon (Zone 8a).

Heat

"I think the future trend, if we keep having summers like last year's, is heat-resistant plants that hardly blink at extremely high temperatures," said Chicagoan Eileen Hanley, author of the Gatsbys Garden blog, noting that heat-resistant and drought-tolerant aren't the same thing. Those that survived the heat in her garden last summer included heucherellas, some heucheras, phlox, daylilies, ornamental grasses, amsonia and some groundcovers. You can ask a local garden center or botanic garden which varieties do best in your area.

Jane Schwartz Gates, of Gates & Croft Horticultural Design in the desert/chaparral area of Santa Clarita, California, uses heat-tolerant favorites like Jerusalem sage, guara, Flower Carpet roses, cosmos, Storm™ agapanthus and Festival Burgundy® cordyline. Storm, the only agapanthus to survive the Dallas Arboretum's famous plant "trials by fire" in extreme heat, is also favored as a firescaping plant – along with Festival Burgundy cordyline –in hot, dry regions.

Van Mullekom said the same plants that survived drought very well in her garden last summer also performed like champs in the record heat. 'Limelight' and 'Unique' were the two varieties of hydrangeas that did well in the high temperatures with minimal watering.

Too wet/freshwater flooding

"Very few plants can tolerate standing water or soggy ground," said Greg Frank, vice president of Ted Collins Tree and Landscape in precipitation-heavy Victor, NY (Zone 6a). "If the air pockets around soil particles are filled with water, the plant will suffocate."

A full immersion while a plant is dormant shouldn't hurt it, said Frank: "And once they're growing in the spring, a 24- to 48-hour immersion won't stress them that badly. But much more than that will stress and weaken the plant in a very short time."

Frank said the following plants can tolerate “wet feet” (soil that’s mostly wet, even with a possible 24-hour period of standing water, but that still contains enough air pockets for roots to “breathe”):

- **Trees:** red maple, Juneberry (serviceberry), locust, Kentucky coffee tree, larch, magnolia, sycamore, red oak and willow.
- **Shrubs:** shrub dogwood (red or yellow twig and grey stem), summersweet, witch hazel, privet, bayberry and viburnum (arrowwood and cranberry).
- **Groundcovers:** vinca and ajuga.
- **Perennials:** hosta, astilbe, Japanese iris, liriopse, bee balm, sedges and many ornamental grasses.

Milliman, who lives near Frank in Caledonia, NY, also likes her colorfully foliated Tropicanna® cannas, which she says are “amazing in their ability to grow quite literally with their roots in water.”

“The standout roses in this department were definitely the Flower Carpet roses,” adds Milliman. “They were floriferous and fantastic the whole season and showed not a hint of black spot, though the conditions for fungal disease were, at times, perfect.”

Cold/frost

“Spring-blooming bulbs are, as a rule, pretty tough in the face of inclement weather,” said Cold Climate Gardening blog author Kathy Purdy, who lives in Chenango Forks, NY (Zone 5a). “Columbine foliage will rebound from a freeze and make an attractive foil to the bulbs,” she continued. “Self-seeding pansies and violas and plants that wintered over from last year can take the frost, but if you bought plants in spring, they may not be hardened off enough to be durable.”

In the fall, Purdy says, the following plants will still look good after a frost (when the temperature dips below 36 degrees Fahrenheit): *Malva sylvestris* (common mallow), heuchera (coral bells), Jacob's ladder and most roses. After a hard freeze (temperatures below 28 degrees Fahrenheit), Purdy counts on dianthus, alyssum, pansies, colchicums, golden sedum and grey artemisia.

SIDEBAR

Natives, neighbors and the Net

When choosing weather-extreme plants for your climate, said Van Mullekom, it also helps to “use a mix of plants native to your area, because they adapt to changing climate conditions.”

“You need to look around to see what works well where you are... run it through the local screen,” added Bruce Butterfield, marketing research director at the National Gardening Association. He also advises doing your homework before buying a plant: “I don’t buy almost anything now without finding out what I can about it online.”

Fact sheets

[Flower Carpet roses](#)

[Tropicanna cannas](#)

[Storm agapanthus](#)

Hi-res images

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About Tesselaar

Tesselaar Plants searches the world and introduces new plants for the home garden, landscape, home décor and gift markets. Tesselaar undertakes extensive research and development of its varieties and, once they're selected for introduction, provides marketing and promotional support through its grower and retail network. The Tesselaar philosophy is to introduce exceptional plants while “making gardening easy” for everyone, so it makes its products as widely available as possible. Tesselaar believes the more gardeners there are, the better it is for everyone.

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