

Astilbes make a strong show



One of my favorite perennials is the astilbe, a herbaceous plant belonging to the saxifragaceae family. The glossy leaves retain their lovely green or bronze foliage throughout the growing season and the feathery spired blooms are a delight. Astilbes range in color from deep red, pink, peach and white. A bed, or just a single plant gives much pleasure.

If you choose to use a single plant, give it a place of honor and be careful to choose a suitable background such as a dark-leaved conifer. Whether planted in a straight row or in drifts, the effect is always enchanting.

Astilbes come in sizes suitable for the rock garden, 6-12 inches high. Others can grow from 18 inches to three feet. Bleeding heart, primula, iris and monarda make friendly companions in the garden.

Space plants 8-18 inches apart, depending on the species, for optimum growth. Astilbes like to have their feet wet, but appreciate good drain-

age. They are an excellent choice for semishaded areas. A soil rich in humus is welcome. They are heavy feeders and should have an annual dressing of compost or your favorite "treatment." Don't let the ground dry out around these plants, as they have shallow roots. A mulch will help to keep the soil moist in summer and prevent heaving in the winter.

Propagation by division or rooted offshoots (in the spring) will increase your stock.

Some pink, peachy and rose shades are "Rheinland," "Astro Roses," "Queen Alexandra" and "Gloria Superba." A few of the reds are "Panal," "Feuer" and "Red Sentinel." White ones include "Deutschland," "Snow Cloud" and "Bridal Veil." You won't be disappointed.

The tulips and other spring flowering bulbs have been spectacular this year. A reminder to all of you who grow tulips and other bulbs. Cut the seedhead just below where the petals



down to earth

Marty Figley

were attached after the blooms have faded to ensure that the energy to produce next season's flowers goes to the bulb where the food is stored.

The leaves (which are vital to this process) should remain on the plant and allowed to ripen. They should be removed when they turn brown. The leaves on smaller flowering bulbs should not be twisted and tied to hide their unsightly appearance, as they too are the means by which food is produced for the storage tank.

The flowering chrysanthemums that you recently purchased can be enjoyed for several months by fol-

lowing some guidelines for their care. After the blooms fade, pinch off the flowers. The plants will soon put out new growth that should be pinched off every two or three weeks. Stop this procedure by July 4. Watch the new growth and pinch whenever there is enough growth to leave two sets of leaves per shoot after the tip is pinched out.

Soon you will have the plants growing to form a mound several times larger than the ones you bought in the spring. They will reward you for your effort in the fall season with a new burst of color.

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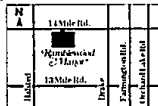
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