

New Plants to Try

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Like many gardeners who like beautiful flowers, I keep an eye out for new plants to try. This year I found three: delphinium, hibiscus, and mandevilla. The delphinium and hibiscus are growing as perennials in my neighborhood; the mandevilla I saw in a garden center. All were spectacular.

The delphiniums came first, tall brilliant blue spikes growing on the west side of house in late May and early June. The lady who lived there said the previous owner had planted them. Her friends said the ones she had planted didn't grow. That's because delphiniums are difficult to grow in our climate.

Delphiniums are in the ranunculaceae family and are native of Europe and northern Asia. In the Pacific Northwest, there are hybrids that grow 4 to 6 feet tall. A smaller 2 to 3 foot cultivar, delphinium grandiflorum or Chinese larkspur, is usually grown here. Though both have the common name of larkspur, larkspur and delphinium are not the same species.

Delphiniums require attention. The plants prefer full sun but like shade in the afternoon and do not do well in hot humid summers. They are heavy feeders and require fertilization in the spring and again in the fall and pruning and deadheading. They also need to be staked because the stems are hollow and brittle. Beautiful to look at but in need of care. They are called short lived perennials. And one more caveat, all parts of the plant are toxic.

The hibiscus and mandevilla are both blooming now. They are both tropical plants which cannot survive our winters. They can be brought inside.

Many hibiscus have large 5 petaled flowers (there are double flowers where the petals are not so distinguishable). Missouri Botanical Gardens calls them funnel like flowers and gives the size as 4-8 inches in diameter. The flowers are short lived like day lilies.

One of my neighbors has 4 to 6 feet tall deep red ones, 3 to 5 tall white ones with red centers, and a pot of 1-2 feet tall yellow ones with red centers. They are absolutely gorgeous.

The hibiscus is a member of mallow family. There are over 300 species of the plant but the one most commonly grown in Ohio is *Hibiscus rosa-sinesis*. It is also called Chinese hibiscus and is a native of Asia. Some people grow the plants as annuals, others bring them inside because they do make good houseplants. Inside they can reach a size of 5-6 feet tall, probably pruned to keep them from getting bigger.

Hibiscus require full sun and well drained moist soil and require fertilization. University of Minnesota Extension gives detailed instructions on soil, temperature, light, watering, and pruning. They can be propagated from cuttings.

Mandevilla are a member of the apocynaceae family and are native to central American and northern South America. They are only winter hardy in zones 10-11 and must be brought indoors to survive in Ohio. The plants need a moist well drained soil and full sun.

Mandevilla are vines. The Huron Garden Club has placed one in the center of the garden at Lakefront Park. It is pink, probably mandevilla X amabilis, and is trailing up a heart shaped trellis. It is just now starting to bloom vigorously and create an interesting design in the center of the garden.

I bought a mandevilla for myself, one with brilliant red flowers. It is growing well on a trellis near my patio. I hope to bring it indoors this winter and keep it until next year. There is a challenge in this also – I do not want to bring in insects with the plant and bringing in either hibiscus or mandevilla probably includes use of insecticides first.

Christine Pfister McComas of University of Maryland Extension has a brief article on delphiniums. She begins with these words “Gardeners can be a romantic, optimistic bunch who fall for plants, that, though beautiful, are difficult and buy them anyway.” I guess I fit that description but that is one of the fun things about gardening.