



Tracy's Trophy Plants

Tracy's top five plant picks that meet every criteria for toughness, beauty and durability found in her latest book, *50 High-Impact, Low-Care Garden Plants*:

TREE (sun/partial shade): paperbark maple

PERENNIAL (sun, flowering): blue false indigo

PERENNIAL (partial to full shade, flowering): hellebore

SHRUB (sun/shade): Henry's garnet Virginia sweetspire

ORNAMENTAL GRASS (sun/partial shade, variegated): Miscanthus cosmopolitan



BLUE FALSE INDIGO

garden VARIETY

Horticultural expert and queen of deadheading, Tracy DiSabato-Aust, wrote the book on beautiful and varied low-maintenance gardening

Multiseason interest, colorful foliage and long-lasting blooms: these are the stuff of any gardener's dreams. But add "low-maintenance" to that list, and even the most imaginative gardeners might become skeptical.

"The goal is to spend more time enjoying (the garden) and less time worrying about working in it," says Tracy DiSabato-Aust, international gardening expert and author of *50 High-Impact, Low-Care Garden Plants: Tough But Beautiful Plants Anyone Can Grow*. DiSabato-Aust's latest tome shares clear, colorful and concise advice for achieving a beautiful garden without a lot of effort and time.

DiSabato-Aust will share such aha moments from her experiences gardening around the world during two talks at the Central Ohio Home

& Garden Show. She'll share her criteria for picking plants that are tough, beautiful and durable; a checklist she honed locally.

The practical horticulturist lives in central Ohio among 140 acres of fields, wetlands and woods she has named Hiddenhaven. All of her plant selections and advice are time-tested here in what she calls her "living lab."

But as an author and lecturer who often is traveling, and who, with her husband, is a competitive triathlete for Team USA, DiSabato-Aust doesn't have time to coddle persnickety plants. However, that doesn't mean she demands anything less than a breathtaking garden.

"I don't want to give up anything," she says. "I want all the bang for the buck."

DiSabato-Aust knows there are many busy homeowners in her track shoes. Her newest book is written for those who are young, busy or just getting started in the garden, she says. She wanted to let other gardeners know that they could have it all — and a beautiful garden, too.

In her own vast gardens, DiSabato-Aust applies a simple rule she hopes to pass on: three strikes and you're out. She gives any plant a few tries before banishing it from the gardens forever. This gives green thumbs a chance to correct or compensate for things such as watering issues, unhealthy or diseased plants, and poor soil.

Eighty percent of plant problems stem from poor soil, DiSabato-Aust says, especially here in Ohio where soil is heavy clay with low organic nutrients. But maybe most importantly, she says, a three-strikes policy helps gardeners identify which plants make sense for Ohio's growing region.

"Embrace (plants) that are happy growing in our climate,"

CENTRAL OHIO HOME & GARDEN SHOW

Gardening author and lecturer Tracy DiSabato-Aust will share her horticultural knowledge, offer advice and answer audience questions on Feb. 27 at the Central Ohio Home & Garden Show, presented by PNC. DiSabato-Aust takes the Garden Stage at 1 and 3 p.m.



PAPERBARK MAPLE

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In contrast to native or noninvasive plants that naturally thrive here, high-maintenance plants require more watering, fertilizing, pruning, staking and pest prevention, DiSabato-Aust says. Low-maintenance plants are simply a good investment all around.

"They're time and money saving, and environmentally sound," DiSabato-Aust says.

She also recommends that gardeners use a variety of plants in their landscape to create a biodiverse natural environment that resists pest infestation. For example, many plants attract beneficial insects that eat harmful pests, and some native plants are less vulnerable to pests found here in central Ohio.

She recommends planting species in groups, or drifts, of three, five or seven for an aesthetically pleasing design. Incorporate different textures and heights of shrubs, perennials and bulbs. This will help ensure multiseason interest as well.

No matter how much time homeowners might have to spend in their yards, DiSabato-Aust says it's important they take even a few moments to make an everyday connection to nature. The horticulturist, who inherited her love of gardening from her Italian grandfathers, considers it a vital part of life.

"We're getting further and further away from a connection," DiSabato-Aust says. "I believe we all need that connection to nature."🌿



HELLEBORE