

Your Garden Can Show Pride

Can you say gayfeather?

I've been dreaming of a gay garden. The opportunities abound for inappropriate ramblings of what plants qualify.

Of course, there are the easy ones. Like **Gayfeather**, also known as *Liatris spicata*. It has many great qualities other than its name, mainly that it blooms beautiful purple stalks in the deep of summer, when the spring flush has subsided and many flowers have stopped putting on a show. It's my little drag queen that just keeps singing.

Since it's the season of Pride, there's always the **Pride of Madeira**, *Echium candicans*, such a tease of beauty in coastal areas. The most gorgeous Pride of Madeira I've seen are in Santa Barbara, Calif. Huge, monstrous purple blue flowers in such a sturdy plant. I've tried growing them in Portland, but without a long enough hot season, mine didn't bloom. Alas, no pride in my gay garden.

Last year I came across a basil named **Aussie Sweetie**, *O.b. Lesbos*. Now how was I supposed to see that and not buy it? My Lesbos basil was very tasty, by the way. Of course I knew it would be. It was described as a "variety slow to bloom." Give it a break, ladies. She came out later in life.

Anytime I see this plant I shout its common name out loud because of, well, its name. **Red Hot Poker**. Also known as *Kniphofia uvaria*. There are several different varieties, but the great qualities are its drought tolerance, and large, erect flowers. You know, like a red hot poker. See? You'll

say it out loud every time you see one now too. G-A-Y.

What is the plant that says gggrrrrrr? *Acanthus mollis*, thank you. Also known as **Bear's Breeches**. I might assume those breeches come with leather chaps and a handlebar mustache, but I could be wrong.

Next up? I've been called a lipstick lesbian many times in my life, but I've never been called *Aeschynanthus radicans*, also known as the **Lipstick Plant**. It is a gorgeous vine (did you expect anything but?) with bright red flowers and can even be grown as a houseplant.

If you're into zonal denial, you can always try your hand at *Billbergia pyramidalis*, **Flaming Torch**. A tropical or tender perennial, it certainly flames well in areas like Florida and Texas, although it may not be completely out of the closet.

Georgia O'Keefe is famous for her beautiful watercolors of sexually explicit flowers, but did she ever paint **Dykes Seashore Iris**? One can only wonder.

Last but not least? The **Pansy**. Enough said.

DEAR SASSY GARDENER:

I'm in the mood for vines, and because we're mainly focusing on edibles, do you have any ideas? Something that can both climb and produce food?

Good question! I love thinking about planting with multiple purposes; plants can



serve many purposes, so put them to good use. Vines are good when you're trying to maximize your space because they grow verti-

cally. My top recommendation for edible vines are hops, especially because we live in one of the beer capitals of the continent. Hops are beautiful vines whose flowers provide the essence of some of the best beers, and their flowers have other medicinal purposes as well (like helping induce sleep and, some say, an aphrodisiac). Some additional ideas:

- **Kiwis:** A great pick because it is a beautiful plant and provides delicious fruit. The key to kiwi selection in Portland is finding one that ripens early: They have a long growing season, but I've known gardeners who have a harvest (if planned correctly) just in time for the first freeze, then bring them in to slowly ripen in egg cartons in their garage, ready for Thanksgiving. That's a special time to have fruit from your garden!


- **Grapes:** Is there anything more decadent than deep blue purple grapes dripping from a vine? I've had my eye on a type called *Glenora*, said to have a spicy flavor. Yum!

- **Beans and peas:** A classic in the kitchen garden. I'm growing Chinese Yardlong Beans for the first time this year. I'm mainly interested in their freakshow output of bright red beans that get as long as a yard, but there are many different types of beans to consider growing if you're seeking edible vines. 10

LEANN LOCHER gardens with pride in North Portland. And she loves to hear from other gardeners. E-mail her at sassygardener@gmail.com or visit her blog at www.sassygardener.com.



A very queer basil, **O.b. Lesbos**. How can a lesbian see this basil for sale and not buy it?!



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