

While recently visiting a client's yard, I was reminded of the expression, *tried-and-true*. As we gardeners prepare for a new gardening season, the media is constantly showering us with advertisements promoting new plants for 2016. Sometimes the ads boast about older plants being new and improved. I must admit, I do enjoy trying new plants, but I also appreciate those plants that can be described as *tried-and-true*.

Tried-and-true translates to something being worthy of one's trust. A tried-and-true friend is one who has always been there for you. Other descriptive words could be reliable, steady, and proven.

Through the years I've grown many reliable plants that have proven themselves to be tried-and-true; however, I've also encountered those that have failed miserably. As stated earlier, I recently visited a client's yard. In our conversation, we both admitted that it is enjoyable to try new plants, but we also agreed that trying new doesn't always equate to success. Although failure could and should be viewed as a learning experience, it also can be an expensive experience. The client shared with me her latest method of choosing plants that are nearly guaranteed to spell success. She indicated that when she desires to plant something new in her yard, she drives through neighborhoods that have been around for many years. When she sees older, established plants in the landscape, ones that she likes, she stops and asks the homeowner the names. Her theory is if a particular plant has stood the test of time and succeeded in these older landscapes, it should do well in her landscape—examples of tried-and-true.

Of late, I've been practicing her *modus operandi*. While cruising old neighborhoods, I've been noticing a particularly beautiful flowering shrub that has been in the landscape for many years. The shrub is occasionally called Japonica, but more commonly it is called flowering quince. Its genus species name is *Chaenomeles speciosa*.



For whatever reason, I think flowering quince has fallen out of favor and is not widely planted anymore. It certainly is beautiful and most reliable. Perhaps it is time to take another look at this tried-and-true shrub.

Flowering quince was introduced into the United States in the 1800's. Today it is grown for its profusion of flowers that cover the entire shrub before its leaves appear. Flowers can range from red to pink, coral and even

white. Flowers either appear alone or in clusters. Some of the best modern cultivars include 'Texas Scarlet', a 3-foot tall plant with tomato-red blooms; 'Cameo' a double, pinkish shrub growing to five feet tall; and 'Jet Trail', a white shrub growing to 3 feet tall.

As the blooms fade, leaves begin to emerge. The foliage is glossy green and arranged alternately on the stems. Flowering quince is a round-topped, deciduous shrub capable of growing six to ten feet across. Flowering quince produces stout thorns, and, at one time, it was common to see hedges made from it. Some cultivars form yellowish green fruit called a quince. The ripened fruit makes excellent jelly.



This shrub is very hardy and long lived. It does best in full sun and is tolerant of a wide array of soil types. Pruning should be done immediately after blooming, since new growth bears next year's flowers. Suggested uses for this plant include specimen plant, border, barrier, hedge, and a plant that attracts wildlife. The shrub is incredibly tough and grows without any problems.

Flowering quince is often dismissed because it has such a short period of beautiful display. Ten days to two weeks is about all you get. But, if you have a sunny spot and want a shrub that is tried-and true, flowering quince is a great choice.