

Nature's Air Fresheners

By Audrey McMurray

If you have ever been to a TRR event, you know that no one goes home empty handed. Our plant lottos are always full of wonderful offerings brought by all but the newest of members. As we look over the booty before the first ticket numbers are called out, inevitably you'll hear someone ask, "Does it have a scent?" It's the same question I ask when someone suggests a rose I might like.

Due to allergies, I cannot use most air fresheners, carpet powders, etc., in my home, so any plant that "throws" its scent into the air is a winner in my book. I thought perhaps you would like to know my ten past and present favorites. Keep in mind, though, that smell is a capricious sense. A plant that one person may describe as heavily perfumed may be almost unscented to another. I could barely smell Sombreuil, for example, even when I put it right up to my nose, but when it was in bloom, visitors to my backyard would ooh and ahh over it's scent before we ever made it to the plant!

1. The number one spot has to go to Madame Isaac Perreire. She was planted around my bedroom window in our old house and as soon as I can, I'll be planting another in our new house. Since she's so thorny, her branches double as bio-burglar bars and when she flushes, the whole room is filled with her perfume. My nose is so sensitive to this rose, I can smell it through the window. (8' climber)
2. Cape jasmine - The gentleman from Spring, TX who gave me two bushes about fifteen years ago called this variety the "parent of modern-day gardenias". He took great pains to explain that even though he didn't know the exact name, it was not a hybrid gardenia and it could not be bought from a nursery. They did swimmingly well in large patio pots until the painter we hired threw his solvents over them, and even then, they struggled to survive before finally giving up during this summer's drought. If I ever find out what they were, I'll root some more for sure. (5' x 4' bush-in a pot)
3. Honeysuckle - Our neighbor had a honeysuckle that was the color of tutti-frutti and could be smelled from across her driveway and past part of our lawn. I will be planting it for the first time in the Spring because of it is so fragrant and because we need to attract bees to our square-foot gardens to pollinate the vegetables. I list it #3 because it pulls double duty.
4. Patchouli - Ok you ex-hippies, you know exactly what this is! Now instead of lighting incense, you can grow this in your garden. One whiff and you'll remember...oh Lord, what was it we did back then when we smelled patchouli? (Let's move on...)
5. Sweet Almond Verbena (*Aloysia virgata*) - I first smelled this tree at King's Nursery in Teneha, TX. There was one plant in bloom in a 5 gallon pot and you could smell it all over the place. I took that plant home and it grew into a medium-sized tree that was absolutely delicious. The blooms themselves are not that impressive but that's ok, their scent is. (15')

6. Mexican Mint Marigold (*Tagetes lucida*) became one of my favorites after I smelled licorice waft through the air at the Rose Emporium. I planted it in the garden of a pal who was losing his eyesight and it loved that sunny spot so much, he had to keep cutting it back, though it was a pleasant task. (2')
7. I grow, or have grown, several roses that don't exactly scent the air outdoors, but a bouquet with a couple of their blooms will scent a room: Maggie, Monsieur Tillier, Othello, Fisherman's Friend, Felicia, and Devoniensis.
8. Four O'Clocks (*Mirabilis jalapa*) are plants that will make even the most tired of workers glad to be home at the end of a long day. Yes, they can take over if they like where you planted them. Yes, they drop their seeds and pop up unexpectedly. But what a charming smell in the late, hot afternoon! And what else will bloom right through our blistering Texas summer heat? (3' x your whole flower bed)
9. Holy basil was given to me by a teacher friend and I have to say, it is even more pleasant than my lime basil, which I love. I grow it at the bottom of a large potted plant and if you brush past it, the patio is filled with its cloves-and-basil perfume. I would not have thought the combination of those two would be so appealing. (18")
10. Crinums can be so strongly scented that bringing them indoors can be almost too much of a good thing, but out in the garden, they are great. I think God looked sympathetically at gardeners who worked hard all day and didn't have energy left to tend their garden and said, *Ok, here's an easy one for you*. Every once in awhile I go out and yank off a brown, lower leaf but other than that, I pretty much ignore the darlings. They put up with absolutely the worst of conditions and still bloom. What more could we ask? I don't know which ones are the most scented because I have such a hodge-podge of them scattered around, it's impossible to tell one's scent from the other's! (1 ½' to 3 ½')