

Feverfew—A special plant for any garden

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I would challenge anyone to find more reasons to love a plant than I am about to describe. This one is the backbone, the highlighter and the healer in my garden. A generous seeder, but never invasive, it is free-flowering, and a lover of both sun and shade. Its little white flowers with tiny yellow centers provide the splash of white that Monet used in his paintings to make the surrounding flowers shimmer. I mix it into all of my flower borders. This special plant is *Chrysanthemum parthenium*, or Feverfew.

Various forms grow to heights of between 9 inches and 2 feet. The leaves are deeply cut and a rich green color. There is also a form with a bright gold leaf that nearly glows and one with a yellow flower and green leaves. I have some with large centers and a single row of petals and some where the flower is so full that the center is barely visible. The flowers are borne on stiff stems held high above the foliage, unless grown in total shade where they tend to be weak and flop on the ground.

I enjoy playing with the plants to get the longest season of bloom possible. I trim back the outer stems of the flowering stalk, leaving the center uncut. The center will bloom first, and as the inside flowers fade, the outside stems mature and begin blooming. After the entire stem is spent, I cut it off and this generous plant will bloom again in late summer. Bloom time can also be controlled by transplanting at different times during the spring, thereby setting it back a bit. It balks at being transplanted, so it is wise to keep the roots as undisturbed as possible and to keep it watered until it accepts its new position.

Feverfew is perennial. As the plants age, they become large and woody. When they outgrow their allotted space, I pull them out and start over with a new plant, but that's just me. The large plants are just as garden-worthy in the right situation as the small ones.

Feverfew is as lovely indoors as out. A summer bouquet isn't complete without the addition of this perfect little filler. It can be picked with long stems and used in large arrangements or stripped down to the smaller side shoots for a pretty little nosegay. It will still be looking fresh long after the other flowers in your arrangement have faded. The flower and leaf scent can be rather strong but I think, perhaps due to my emotional attachment, it smells good. I've been told the flowers can also be dried but they have always turned brown for me and I have no use for brown flowers.

Feverfew seems to be so completely pest-and-disease free that not even the rabbits will eat it. I've read that it will protect Roses from aphid infestations if planted nearby.

It has been credited with many medicinal properties, but I cannot personally attest to any of them. The most popular use these days is for relief from migraines. It is also said to help prevent blood clots, to give anti-inflammatory relief of arthritis, and to aid digestion. One can even bind it to the wrist for relief of ague, fever combined with chills or shivering.

If that's not enough to keep me enamored, the origin of it in my garden certainly is. It was given to me by my Mother, who had it in her garden for as long as I can remember. Now the memory of her lives in my garden year after year through this useful, carefree and lovely plant.

—Rita Thomas