



Red Dragonwing Begonia on top, and the white flowered Lobularia 'Snow Princess' trailing down. This planter is in full sun.

**Considering Wisconsin weather as a whole**, there really is no such thing as normal. We might see the occasional stretch of normal weather, but no matter how average the season may seem, there are always periods of extreme weather, and those extremes disturb the whole notion of normal. That said, I must report that in my little corner of northeastern Racine County the weather this summer has been quite favorable for gardening. The only significant aberrations have

been a couple of heavy rains---but nothing like the deluges experienced in Milwaukee this summer. One result of this favorable weather is that there really has been no dry spell. I don't believe I have seen any burned out, brown lawns. Usually they are commonplace at this time of year. This moderate weather pattern has resulted in gardens needing much less care.

Here are some great garden performers that I have seen this summer---apparently the weather is to their liking, too.



A large pot Dragonwing Red Begonia, growing in full shade.

'Dragonwing Begonia'----this relative newcomer has already become a staple for low maintenance gardens, and deservedly so. It probably likes a little more shade than sun, but I have seen superb examples flourishing in full sun. This planter is in full sun---it is watered and fertilized without fail. The basket is in full shade and is also well cared for. There is hardly a longer blooming, more carefree plant for growing in our area. It comes in pink, too.

'Elegant Feather' is truly a "Wow----what is that?" kind of plant. It is even newer than the Dragonwing Begonia---in fact, I haven't found a recent book that mentions it, but of course you can read about it on the internet. Botanically, it is *Eupatorium capillifolium* 'Elegant Feather.' Considered a weed in the southeast United States, where the species is native, this particular cultivar has been selected for its statuesque habit and also for the fact that it is sterile. It will not reseed and become a nuisance like its weedy cousin that has spread along the roadsides in Georgia and South Carolina. It can be grown in the ground or in a pot---you only need one to make a bold statement. This potted one is about 72" tall (not including the pot) and about 60" wide. It is large, but delicate and airy---in fact you can see through much of it. Thus, it is easier to place than other large plants that have more bulk. Its soft texture makes it a great choice for softening rocks and buildings.



*Eupatorium* 'Elegant Feather.' A real attention grabber.



Lobularia 'Snow Princess' with the annual blue salvia.

Another new annual that has attracted considerable notice in the plant world is Lobularia 'Snow Princess.' The creators of this new gem insist on ignoring its traditional name---Sweet Alyssum---instead calling it Lobularia, its true botanical name. It seems they don't want gardeners confusing it with older varieties of this plant. True enough, it is a distinctly superior plant. It has a much longer bloom period than the old Sweet Alyssum, which typically petered out as summer's heat wore on. Also,

'Snow Princess' is much more robust, less straggly. This newcomer is a sterile plant, so it is propagated by cuttings---more costly than seed propagation. The result is it must sell for more money, but it is also a much better plant. With its improved vigor, fewer plants are needed. It is a perfect filler for containers and window boxes.