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**Plants That Do Well In Parking Strips**

One of the biggest gardening challenges is trying to garden in a parking strip, that’s why these potential gardening plots are sometimes called ‘hell strips’ because of the difficulties of choosing plants that will survive in the challenging conditions that parking strips present.

The challenges parking strip gardeners face include:

* reflected heat from paved roads and concrete sidewalks
* poor soil
* irrigation/drainage
* height issues
* city regulations
* maintenance
* foot traffic from people parking along the strip and stepping out onto the strip
* dogs

Any garden should always be created starting with the philosophy of the ‘right plant, right place’ and this approach applies doubly so when gardening in a parking strip. It’s crucial to select hardy native plants that are already proven winners in your local climate. Select those native plants that are heat and drought tolerant even if you live in a cooler climate, because the intensity of the heat reflected from the concrete of sidewalks and roadways is high. Plus, if you do live in a colder climate with lots of snow, it would be wise to additionally consider the effects or road and sidewalk salting on the area. Once you take into account your planting region and climate, as well as the unique conditions of a parking strip, your list of what to plant in that spot will narrow considerably.

Please consider your own planting zone and conditions, but some plants that might be successful include:

* Catmint
* Heathers
* Lavenders
* Coreopsis
* Russian sage
* Groundcovers –creeping thyme, snow-in-summer
* Spring bulbs – irises, daffodils, crocuses, tulips
* Sedums – ice plants, hen and chicks

The soil in your parking strip may be different than the clay, sand, loam or silt that you have in the main areas of your garden, so test the soil to determine whether a plant you are considering will be happy in those conditions, or consider removing all the soil in your parking strip and adding new soil if you have the budget. In addition, pay attention to drainage issues at the location, is the rain runoff from your home pooling in this spot? You may have the opposite of a drainage problem, maybe the location’s proximity to concrete will mean that even drought tolerant plants may need a little moisture on the very hottest summer days, so consider irrigation needs and potential challenges, even the hardiest plants may need some occasional watering. You might also consider using some large rocks as both a design element and a way to cut down on the number of plants you may need to water.

Another important factor to consider for a parking strip is the height that plants will be at maturity. If you are thinking about placing a tree in your parking strip, be aware that you may have to get a tree permit from your town before planting. Many cities have ordinances about planting trees in parking strips because the height of the tree may hit power lines, and the potential for large branches to fall on cars in a storm, or to block storm drains, can be dangerous or cause damage. Large tree roots may also cause problems to the sidewalk, as anyone who has ever tripped on an uneven sidewalk caused by tree roots pushing up the sidewalk can attest.

It would be a good idea to check with your municipality regarding regulations and permits and see if they provide a list of trees recommended for parking strips.

Trees that work well in parking strips three foot wider or larger include:

* Flowering crabapple, cherry, plums
* American Redbud
* Imperial Honey Locust

Even if you do not plant any trees in your parking strip, it’s still important to think about the height and overall size of your plants. Will the plant block driver’s ability to see? Will the plant get so large that it will extend into the sidewalk impeding pedestrians using the walk? If you park your car in front of the parking strip, will it be difficult to open car doors? Again, consider the maintenance of the plants too. Trimming and pruning plants that are located further from your main yard and garden may not be as convenient.

Finally, parking strips present some special challenges. If many cars park along your parking strip, will people step out of their car and onto your plantings? You may want to consider placing a few strategic stepping stones, or choose ground covers that are considered ‘stepables’ meaning they can take a degree of foot traffic. Also consider the dog traffic around your neighborhood, some plants struggle more than others when consistently ‘watered’ by the neighborhood pooch.

Although parking strips are specialized garden environments that need some extra planning and thought, the rewards of planting in them outweigh the concerns. Parking strip planting improves your curb appeal, reduces street litter, and soaks up rain runoff from buildings. In addition, people who plant their strips often find an increase in neighborhood pride and community building, as people strolling by on the sidewalk will often stop and chat with the parking strip gardener who dares to turn a hell strip into a small patch of garden heaven.