

Politics and gardening really do mix

By Arthur O. Tucker
Delaware State University

Plants differ from animals in many ways. The extremely slow movement and lack of an immune system forces plants to utilize other defense mechanisms to ward off competition and predators.

Many plants compensate for this by releasing chemicals. One chemical defense system is called allelopathy. Probably the most famous case of allelopathy is the black walnut (*Juglans nigra*). Black walnut leaves drip a chemical called juglone, which inhibits seed germination. As a result, except for a few resistant grasses, few competing plants will grow under a black walnut tree. On the flip side of the coin, some plants benefit each other in what is called "companion planting."

I always wondered if my choice of plants in my garden is beneficial or detrimental to the other plants. In one case, a visitor to my garden made a comment about my "politicopathy." She commented that I really shouldn't be planting "Laura Bush" petunia next to my "Eleanor Roosevelt" peony.

Okay, the colors do clash a bit, but I am sure that the plants don't suffer from this juxtaposition of two first ladies from different political parties. This forced me to think about some other plants that I have had in my gardens over the past 55-plus years.

If you really wanted to have a strictly Republican garden, then you might select the roses named after Nancy Reagan (a beautiful pale coral), Abraham Lincoln (deep red)/Mister Lincoln (dark red, intense fragrance), and Barbara Bush (a delicate pale pink). You might complement this with "Betty Ford" daylily (red to deep coral) and the aforementioned "Laura Bush" petunia (deep magenta). There is also the "Lincoln" leek, if you'd like to include some edible landscaping.

For the Democrats, there are the roses named after John F. Kennedy (very pale yellow, almost white), Rosalynn Carter (deep rose to coral), and Lady Bird Johnson (carmine to coral). You might complement this with "Eleanor Roosevelt" peony (pale pink) and



Submitted photo/www.nichollsgardens.com

The "Eleanor Roosevelt" iris is a dark blue to purple and sometimes found in older gardens.



Submitted photo/www.jacksonandperkins.com

The "Mister Lincoln" hybrid tea rose is dark red with an intense fragrance.

iris (dark blue) and "Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis" daylily (an elegant, fringed pale pink). The citrusy mint named "Hillary's Sweet Lemon" might also be used as a groundcover.

I can't think of flowers named after a national Independent can-

didate or their families except for the Martha Washington geraniums. George did not belong to a political party as we know it today.

Anglophiles also have the availability of flowers named after the Royal Family. However, there are

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still problems with placement. I wonder if "Queen Elizabeth" rose (a full, robust pink) would be antagonistic to Diana, Princess of Wales rose (white edged with pink). I just assume that they would have to be planted in separate beds.

There are a whole host of other themes, such as famous designers, entertainers, French nobles, horticulturists, religious leaders, comic book characters, novel heroes/heroines, and/or cooks, e.g., Julia Child rose (a lovely full yellow to cantaloupe).

I personally think that Julia would have liked to have been paired with a Rainbow Sorbet rose in its tones of pink and yellow. And, of course, there is the "adult garden" with the roses such as "Eros" (brick red) and "Erotika" (dark red).

"Elizabeth Taylor" rose (deep pink with smoky edges) could only be paired with a "Conrad Hilton" rose (golden yellow), sadly without any of her other six husbands, who lack flowers named after them. NASA engineers or science fiction enthusiasts might like the roses "Space Girl" (dark crimson) or Space Walk (Redglo, velvety red).

This brings up our president-elect and his first lady. What flower will be named after Michelle LeVaughn Obama? In September, she was spotted wearing a large blue and white, daisy-like pin (daisies are symbolic of simplicity in the Victorian language of Flowers). The gene jockeys keep talking about the release of the elusive blue rose. On the other hand, to be utterly politically correct today, maybe it should be a selection of an American species.

Editor's note: On the campus of Delaware State University, the Claude E. Phillips Herbarium is Delaware's center for research, education, and outreach about plant identifications, locations, and uses. Call (302) 857-6452 (Dr. Susan Yost) to arrange a tour of the Herbarium, and call (302) 857-6408 (Dr. Arthur Tucker) for more information about this article.