

# Get to know your plant by reading its label



Carla Keast

## AROUND THE YARD

While you might not be able to judge a book by its cover, you can certainly know a plant by its label. You'll find it nearly buried in the side of plant pots, usually too grimy to read, occasionally laying on shelves or floors. If you are a low maintenance gardener, judge a plant first by its label, then fall in love with it.

The first thing to check for is the hardiness zone rating, sometimes merely indicated by a Z. Winnipeg is located in Zone 3, which means plants rated for zones one to three will overwinter without special protection. Many Zone 4 plants will also overwinter depending on the local microclimate.

Light requirement is simply stated or shown as an easily understood symbol.

Moisture requirement is listed in a variety of ways such as normal or medium. If the label says the plant is



Three Black-eyed Susan cultivars can have different flowers and dramatically different heights, ranging between half a metre and two metres.

drought-tolerant or recommends keeping the soil evenly moist, you can assume it is essential for optimum plant vigour.

Both height, width, and spacing recommendations are often indicated with an arrow and accompanying number. Some labels give a range, which

is great as even in ideal growing conditions, plant sizing is not an exact science.

Sometimes there'll be extras such as symbols for butterflies, cut flowers, no deer, as well as verbal information about flowering time, fertilizing, planting, pruning, self-seeding and spreading. This is

great insight to the amount of maintenance the plant will require. Self-seeding and spreading plants can require more maintenance.

If you've got the right spot for that plant, and can meet any other requirements it may have, go ahead and fall in love with it. You'll need the love to get you through the name.

The top of the label will list not one, but several names, and the one that really counts is the one that's just about unpronounceable. This botanical name is consistent worldwide. Often, following in single quotes, is the cultivar name. Cultivars are forms of a plant that have been bred for specific characteristics. Different cultivars of the same plant can vary dramatically from each other. If you fall in love with a plant, and want more of the same, you need to know the botanical name, and if it's a cultivar, the name of that particular cultivar.

*Carla Keast has a master's degree in landscape architecture and is a Winnipeg-based freelance landscape designer. She can be reached at [contact@carlakeast.com](mailto:contact@carlakeast.com).*

Submitted photo