

PLANT CORNER

Welcome to another year of the Plant Corner, a series of profiles of STAR PERFORMERS among perennial garden plants from the folks at Chaska Farm & Garden.



Ligularia dentata 'Britt Marie Crawford'

Ligularias are big and bold plants that need a garden with adequate space. These natives of eastern Asia certainly don't look like daisies, but are in that family (Compositae). They are most at home at water's edge with rich soil, plentiful moisture and semi-shade.

Older varieties of *Ligularia dentata* such as 'Desdemona' and 'Othello' have the large kidney-shaped leaves in dense flattened clumps that look a bit like water lilies standing out of water to give a coarse,

tropical-leaf look, but the leaves were mostly a medium-green to olive color. Some had red leaf undersides but nothing grand.

Enter 'Britt Marie Crawford'. Her leaves are black-purple and almost glossy. This plant is a great breakthrough, it gives amazing contrast and striking color along with the coarse texture of large, round leaves. This mound of hard, dark color can reach 3 ft. tall and stretch wider than tall, pity any smaller or less vigorous neighbor planted too closely!

Oh, and about those 'daisies' you were promised: about mid to late July, up from the center of the leaf clump comes a thick-stemmed, fist-like structure(s) that opens to a cluster of yellow-orange daisy flowers. These daisies have a somewhat bad-hair-day look and are small in proportion to the leaves, but do give a spot of welcome color. You might choose to remove them pre-emptively for a more formal look, or let them be. Goldfinches will enjoy the dollop of daisy seed come winter.

Companion plants for this *Ligularia* would include the usual list of professional wrestlers of garden plants. Joe Pye Weed (*Eupatorium maculatum* 'Gateway'), Hardy Pampas Grass (*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Blondo') and the tall Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia laciniata* 'Herbstonne') all come to mind. In more shade large Hostas like 'Sum and Substance' or 'Blue Angel', and taller Astilbes such as 'Visions' should work. 'Britt Marie Crawford' does not spread rampantly underground, the clump simply elbows for room above ground. Give her plenty of space, and nobody gets hurt.

- Tom