

## in the garden by Stephen and Kristin Pategas



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### Pendula Passion

Some people spend time pruning plants to create unique shapes but some plants do it naturally. Weeping, flowing, dripping, fluid, hanging, pendent, pendulous, drooping – oh the love of all plants cascading. In cooler climes you will find weeping versions of cherries, cedars, crabapples, spruces, pussy willows, hemlocks, pines, birches, mulberry and junipers – all of which will attract the eye in those gardens.

What's a Central Floridian to do? Well, we have a robust selection of bamboos, ornamental grasses, shrubs, palms and trees that are naturally droopy and equally eye-catching. Unique in shape, they attract the eye when contrasted against other more rigid and upright plantings. Their graceful foliage is striking, especially when placed in a location that allows their branches, leaves or needles to stand out. Weeping forms complement water features and soften architectural elements. If it is a unique tree or shrub, treat them as centerpieces using them either solo or as a grouping of three. However, to avoid a cluttered look, don't overdo it with focal point plants. Masses of weeping ornamental grasses can recreate the look of a prairie. Meanwhile arching bamboos and icicle-like palm frond tips contribute to a tropical atmosphere.

Some weeping plants, such as the weeping yaupon holly, occur naturally- and according to the JC Raulston Arboretum, "Weeping growth habit is a genetically controlled trait, usually caused by single gene mutations. These mutations impact the normal response of the plant to gravity (called the geotropic response), resulting in weeping rather than upright branching." Since cascading plants are often collector's items, those discovered in nature or in a nursery are trialed and propagated. Many other pendulous plants are weeping cultivars grafted onto other rootstock. Look for a swollen area and



*Ilex vomitoria* 'Pendula'/Weeping yaupon holly



*Callistemon viminalis* 'Red Cluster'/Red cluster weeping bottlebrush



*Livistona decora*/Ribbon fan palm

when buying one, and check the graft union to make sure it is without cracks.

For some weeping accents to use in your garden, select from the list. Many of them are on display at Harry P. Leu Gardens (the Cascade Falls bald cypress is in their Bog Garden). If you have a successfully growing weeping plant not listed here please let us know so we can add it to the list.

- *Afrocarpus* (formerly *Podocarpus*) *gracilior*/Weeping African podocarpus
- *Callistemon viminalis* 'Red Cluster'/Red cluster weeping bottlebrush
- *Hibiscus* species/Weeping hibiscus
- *Ilex vomitoria* 'Pendula'/Weeping yaupon holly
- *Juniperus procumbens* 'Nana'/Japanese garden juniper (cascade style bonsai)
- *Juniperus scopulorum* 'Tolleson's Blue Weeping'/Tolleson's Blue Weeping juniper
- *Livistona decora* (*decipiens*)/Ribbon fan palm
- *Loropetalum chinense* var. *rubrum* 'Shang-lo' or 'Peack'/Purple Pixie dwarf loropetalum

- *Muhlenbergia dumosa*/Bamboo muhly grass
- *Nassella tenuissima*/Mexican feather grass
- *Otatea acuminata aztecorum*/Mexican weeping bamboo
- *Salix babylonica*/Weeping willow
- *Spiraea cantoniensis*/Reeve's spirea
- *Taxodium distichum* 'Cascade Falls'/Weeping bald cypress
- *Thuja occidentalis* 'Filiformis'/Weeping threadleaf arborvitae
- *Ulmus alata* 'Lace Parasol'/Weeping winged elm

If you have any of these weeping wonders put the power shears away. These plants beg for just a little nip n' tuck, good old-fashioned hand trimming instead. ■

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All photography by Stephen G. Pategas/Hortus Oasis