

# Herbaceous Perennials

## I N A L A B A M A

**H**erbaceous perennials, plants whose tops are killed back by frost but whose roots and crowns survive the winter, have been grown since humankind began gardening. Subsistence farmers once grew herbaceous perennials with bulbs, annuals, herbs, and a few low shrubs mainly for culinary and medicinal uses. Plants with value were collected from the wild and passed along from family to family. They were usually planted with little pretense to design, often in plots around or close to the kitchen entrance for easy processing.

As society became more prosperous, perennials were the primary source of spring, summer, and fall flowers for beds, borders, and rock gardens. Gardeners counted on many of these trusty plants to welcome spring each year with colorful blooms. Other plants provided spectacular flowers of unusual color and form to the summer and fall landscapes.

Unfortunately, perennials lost their popularity for a number of years. This was due perhaps to the introduction of many new annual flowering plants and to the difficulty of properly maintaining a large perennial garden. Interest in perennials, however, has boomed in recent years as many gardeners have rediscovered old favorites and as new, improved cultivars have become available. While tending a perennial garden can be both challenging and rewarding, new and creative applications have extended the perennials' range of utility. These flowers have been applied to a wide variety of garden design situations, a tribute to their versatility. Perennials are used in rock gardens, bog and water

gardens, butterfly and hummingbird gardens, evening gardens, herb gardens, cut and dried flower gardens, and container gardens.

### Facts You Should Know

- By definition, herbaceous perennials grow and flower season after season. Many thrive for a very long time with some care, while others return for only a few years. Some perennials re-seed readily and may move around the garden. Because perennials are permanent installations like trees and shrubs, it is advisable to do a good job of soil preparation and planting from the start.
- Unlike annuals, perennials have a definite season of bloom and a definite period of bloom. Plants bloom in either the spring, summer, or fall. Perennials may bloom from 2 to 8 weeks or longer. The important challenge is to use a selection of perennials so that sufficient color is available throughout the growing season. With the long growing season in the Southeast, it is very difficult to use perennials alone.
- The entire shoot portion of most perennials is killed to the ground in winter, with the exception of a few evergreen perennials. This can leave a stark, empty appearance to the perennial garden in winter. Use evergreen shrubs and



small trees with deciduous perennials and take advantage of evergreen perennials and ornamental grasses.

- Unlike annuals, perennials do not require replanting every year. However, they do require watering, fertilizing, mulching, cutting back, weeding, dividing, and, at times, transplanting. Perennials are, therefore, not maintenance free.
- For beginners, a good perennial garden develops along with the knowledge of the gardener. Perennials have been collected in many different climates from all over the world. There are thousands of species and cultivars to choose from. This can make designing a complete perennial garden from scratch seem a daunting task. Instead, purchase a few perennials and plant them in a mixed border. Get to know the plants and develop a design over time.

## Selecting a Site

One advantage of gardening with perennials is that with thousands of species and cultivars to choose from, a good selection of plants can be found for almost any site, from sunny to deep shade, and from dry, sandy soil to permanently wet clay soil. However, most perennials require full sun for at least 6 hours per day to grow and flower normally. Frequently, maximum temperature and duration and the availability and consistency of soil moisture modify how much sun a plant withstands. Many perennials that perform well in full sun in the northern United States require some protection, at least in the hot afternoon, in the Southeast.

Most perennials require average soil moisture with rain at regular intervals to perform at their best, but there are plenty of choices for dry soil at one extreme and boggy soil at the other. It is a matter of choosing the right species for the site. Generally, the area you select for planting perennials should have well-drained soil. When drainage is poor, many perennials suffer from root and

crown rots, and many perennials will not tolerate constantly saturated soil in the winter when they are dormant. This is a major cause of plants' failing to return after the first year. One tough situation is dry soil and deep shade such as under a large oak tree with competition from roots. A few perennials, however, can perform well there also.

## Planning

The traditional way to display perennials in the landscape is to plant them in beds or borders.

**Beds** are islands of prepared plantings surrounded by turf or paving. They are designed to be viewed from all directions. Beds are usually planted in a circle, oval, square, rectangle, kidney, or other geometric shape. **Borders** are plantings with a backdrop, such as a wall, fence, or hedge. They are designed to be viewed from a few directions. Double borders are two parallel plantings divided by a path for walking and viewing.

Planning an application of perennials may be easy or fairly complex. One easy way to use perennials is to choose one or two species of widely grown perennials and plant different cultivars that bloom at different times. For example, choose an area in a mixed border for day lilies. Then select a number of cultivars that bloom at different times. With this approach, all of the plants will not be in bloom at the same time, but color can be present from spring to late summer. A spot could also be developed in the same way using irises for spring to summer color, chrysanthemums for late summer to fall color, or all-Hostas in a shady area with different foliage patterns.

Another approach is to develop beds or borders that bloom in a specific season. A spring planting using all species that bloom from early to late spring, a summer planting, or a fall planting can be placed in the landscape where you spend time outdoors during those seasons. Designs have also been developed that use one (monochromatic) or two (complementary) colors. Perennials are selected

with flower colors that are shades or tints of the selected color(s). For example, a white garden using flowers colored white to cream and including gray or silver foliage is effective.

Probably the most challenging approach to using perennials is to develop a bed or border with perennials alone. In this case, a wide variety of perennial species are chosen to obtain a succession of color from spring through fall. To be successful, the designer of this kind of planting must have a broad knowledge of perennial species including bloom time, period of bloom, flower color, plant size, and foliage characteristics. A garden using perennials with color throughout the growing season, therefore, requires careful planning.

1. Develop a site plan by measuring the area and drawing it to scale on graph paper.
2. Develop a list of perennials that will grow well in the site.
3. Determine the flower color and mature height and spread of each plant.
4. Develop a table or chart listing the bloom time and period for each perennial.
5. Fit plants to a planting plan based on the information above.
6. For a bed, locate taller plants in the center progressing to shorter plants at the margin of the bed.
7. For a border, locate tall plants in the back and progress to short plants in the front, depending on the directions from which the plants will be viewed.
8. Plant perennials in groups of three, five, or seven.
9. Draw plants to scale into the planting plan.
10. Make a plant material list for purchasing plants.

## Planting Perennials

Planting perennials properly at the right time can determine how prolifically they bloom the first year. Fall is considered the best time to plant perennials in the South. In the coastal areas, planting can be done from September through November. In central Alabama, plant in October as soon as the weather begins to cool. In the mountainous areas, plant in September because hard-freezing weather comes early there. As a rule, plant at least 6 weeks before hard-freezing weather occurs.

Fall-planted perennials continue to develop after planting. They produce an extensive root system during fall and spring, enabling them to firmly establish growth before hot weather begins. This belowground development, though slow, accounts for the rapid flowering and the stocky, well-branched, vegetative growth observed in the spring. Smaller, containerized plants can be purchased in the fall.

Early spring is also considered a good time to plant perennials. Planting early, just after killing frosts have passed, is better than later spring planting. Purchase larger containerized plants that were seeded or propagated the previous fall and overwintered in protective structures such as cold frames. These will bloom the first season. Perennials started from seed in greenhouses during January and February become available as small plants in late spring. These can be planted in April and May. However, many will not bloom prolifically the first year and, in some cases, will not bloom at all until the next year.

Soil preparation is probably the single most important factor in growing perennials successfully. Ideally, a perennial bed should be prepared in the summer for fall planting or in the fall for spring planting. Allow at least 2 months for the soil to settle and for chemical additives to dissolve. In addition to good drainage, provide abundant quantities of organic matter, a soil pH of 5.5 to 6.5, and fertilizer. Add fertilizer and

limestone based on soil test results. Contact your county Extension agent for information on soil testing procedures.

Soils amended with organic matter are much easier to plant and manage. Remove the surface vegetation and add about 4 to 6 inches of organic matter (composted leaves, peat moss, aged manure) into the soil to improve soil aeration and drainage. Adding both lime and fertilizer when you prepare the bed ensures an adequate fertility and pH level. Using a spade or tiller, incorporate fertilizer, lime, and organic matter into the soil to a depth of 8 to 12 inches. With a tiller, till the soil as deeply as possible, first in one direction, and then in the perpendicular direction. Remove rocks and roots as necessary.

If plants are somewhat pot-bound at planting time, simply loosen the roots around the bottom and sides of the root ball and spread them out in the bottom of the planting hole. Cover and firm the soil lightly around the plant. Be sure the crown (the persistent base of a herbaceous perennial) of the plant is at or slightly above ground level. After planting, mulch the planting area with 4 to 6 inches of mulch (pine straw, pine bark, straw, or grain or nut hulls). A pre-emerge herbicide may also be applied to control weeds.

Unlike established trees and shrubs, most herbaceous perennials can be transplanted from one location in the garden to a new location with reasonable care. Transplanting is usually safest in the early spring when growth starts or in the fall once the foliage dies back. Actually, unless the soil is frozen, transplanting can be done any time as long as sufficient water can be supplied.

Two important secrets to growing perennials successfully are watering and controlling weeds. After planting, thoroughly water plants to settle soil around the roots and to dispel any trapped air. Supplying adequate water during the establishment period is essential, and periodic irrigation, especially during the summer, is necessary for plants to grow well.

Weeds crowd out perennials and destroy their attractiveness. Weeds in perennial plantings can be a more difficult problem than weeds in annual beds because the soil is not cultivated yearly and herbicide choices are limited. Mulching and occasional hand weeding are two methods of combating weeds. Mulch perennials after planting to suppress weeds and prevent rapid moisture loss. Heavy mulching in the fall, however, may encourage crown rot.

## Maintaining Perennials

Keeping a good-looking perennial bed should not be a difficult task as long as the plants are carefully chosen and correctly spaced. The following are routine tasks.

- Carefully water after planting and during the first season while the perennials become established. Afterward, water to 1 inch per week during the growing season if water is not supplied by rainfall.
- Keep a diligent watch for weeds, especially for perennial weeds in the first few seasons. Maintaining a good mulch should control annual weeds.
- Cut the dead foliage of perennials to the ground after the first hard freeze in the fall. This task may be done later, but it is best to cut back old foliage before new growth begins in the spring. This is purely a matter of aesthetics. There may actually be some merit to leaving the dead foliage until early spring. Marginal perennials (*Salvia leucantha*) may receive some measure of winter protection from the dead foliage. A cover of pine straw over the crown of marginal perennials (*Heuchera* spp.) can extend the hardiness zone and help prevent frost heaving.
- Divide most perennials periodically. Some require deadheading for continued bloom (*Coreopsis grandiflora*), and others require staking (*Delphinium* and hollyhock). Pinching young growth of many species helps control plant height and results in bushier plants with more flowers (many *Salvia*).



- Fertilize perennials in the spring according to soil test results. During midsummer, you can also add supplemental fertilizer. Do not fertilize perennials in the fall.

## Dividing Perennials

Most perennials eventually become overcrowded and require division. As perennials grow, they expand in size by producing new growth progressively away from the center of the crown. In time, the older center of the crown is no longer productive and dies out. In several species, poor flowering due to overcrowding also indicates the need for division. Dig out the entire clump with a shovel or garden fork, cut or break off the viable outer portions for replanting, and discard the center. Divisions should usually have three to five shoots or growing points. Discard any weak or diseased portions. The time to divide perennials varies somewhat, but it is usually fall or early spring, coinciding with the desired planting times.

## Perennial Care Calendar

### SPRING

**March** Early spring flowering occurs. Cut back leggy or woody perennials (*Artemisia*, *Lavandula*, *Santolina*) every 2 to 3 years in early March (or even late February). Add fertilizer and limestone based on soil test. Renew mulch. Divide summer and fall blooming perennials as soon as they have new shoot growth (*Coreopsis*, *Stokesia*, *Rudbeckia*). Plant new beds prepared in October.

**April** Continue to plant new additions. Divide summer- and fall-blooming perennials. Plant summer-blooming bulbs. Mulch if you have not already done so.

**May** Spring flowers are ending; summer flowers are starting. Stake tall-growing perennials. This is a good time to take terminal cuttings to propagate new

plants. Check for pests. Divide spring-blooming perennials (*Aquilegia*, *Heuchera*, *Hemerocallis*, and *Iris*) after bloom if needed. Start perennial seeds for fall.

### SUMMER

**June** Summer perennials are in peak flower. Cut back perennials that have completed bloom for fall rebloom. Deadhead spent flowers to encourage continued bloom (*Coreopsis grandiflora*). Pinch fall bloomers for bushier plants with more flowers. Order spring bulbs now for fall planting. Fertilize perennials lightly.

**July** Deadhead perennials as needed. Prepare beds for fall planting.

### FALL

**Sept.** Plant fall-flowering bulbs. Order spring-flowering bulbs for fall planting.

**Oct.** Plant new perennials in beds prepared in July. Divide *Cannas*. Cut back plants after heavy frost. Plant spring-blooming bulbs. Mulch beds if needed. Prepare beds for spring planting.

**Nov.** Plant spring bulbs and iris. Mulch for winter protection.

### WINTER

**Dec.** Divide established perennials. Plant summer bulbs.

**Jan.** Early spring bulbs starting to bloom.

**Feb.** Cut back ornamental grasses before new growth starts. Many more spring bulbs blooming. Cut back dead and winter-damaged perennial foliage (*Iris*, *Helleborus*). Check for pests. Weed while plants are small.

## Perennials Recommended for Alabama

The following are a few of the best perennials for Alabama gardeners.

**Balloon Flower** (*Platycodon grandiflorus*). Bloom time: summer. Balloon flower derives its common name from the puffy, balloonlike flower buds. When the “balloons finally pop,” the flowers are soft blue or white with purple veins and yellow stamens. Balloon flower is a long-lived, durable perennial that appreciates light shade in the hottest part of the day and grows to 2 to 3 feet. It is also slow to establish so it will fill out better after a season in the ground. Balloon flower plants seldom need dividing, but they grow tall and can flop over if support is not provided.

**Blanket Flower** (*Gaillardia H grandiflora*). Bloom time: summer. Blanket flower is an excellent perennial for sandy soils with limited moisture and full sun exposure. It is a short-lived perennial that blooms throughout the summer. Petals may be wine red or red with yellow borders. Cultivars grow as short as 12 inches or as tall as 30 inches. The cultivar ‘Goblin’ is widely available.

**Bleeding Heart** (*Dicentra spectabilis*). Bloom time: spring. Bleeding heart is a great plant where shade and adequate soil moisture are available. Growing 1 to 3 feet tall and producing fine-textured foliage, bleeding heart produces long, thin stalks with rose-pink, heart-shaped flowers. Bleeding heart is often used as a woodland plant and appreciates an acid soil amended with plenty of organic matter. Most varieties are rosy red in color; however, several white cultivars are also available.

**Bugle Weed** (*Ajuga reptans*). Bloom time: late spring. Bugle weed is a low-growing, evergreen ground cover with attractive blue flower spikes. It performs best in

moist, shady areas, but it will tolerate sun with adequate moisture. Many cultivars are available with blue, pink, or white flowers. Some are available with pink or white variegated or bronze foliage.

**Butterfly Weed** (*Asclepias tuberosa*). Bloom time: late spring. Butterfly weed grows wild in most parts of Alabama. Generally associated with dry, sandy sites, these plants should not be transplanted from the wild or after they are established in the garden because of their long taproot. Plantings are best established from containerized plants in fall or spring in a full sun location. The brilliant orange clusters of flowers are born in umbels and attract butterflies and hummingbirds. While deep orange is the predominant flower color, cultivars range from pale yellow to oxblood.

**Candytuft** (*Iberis sempervirens*). Bloom time: spring. Candytuft is often used as a low-growing, evergreen shrub substitute to edge foundation plantings or perennial borders. It is a welcome perennial for the rock garden too. The plants add even greater appeal when covered with the flat, dense clusters of white flowers in spring. To keep plants compact and neat, shear them lightly after they bloom to remove seed heads and encourage compact branching. Candytuft prefers full sun and well-drained soil but will tolerate light shade in Alabama.

**Canna Lily** (*Canna H generalis*). Bloom time: midsummer. Canna lilies are bold, colorful plants with large tropical leaves and irislike flowers in yellow, orange, red, and rose. Many cultivars have bronze or yellow variegation in the foliage. They grow well in rich, well-drained, moist soil in full sun or part shade. Once established, the Canna lily takes drought. Plants can be cut to the ground after the first hard frost.

**Columbine** (*Aquilegia H hybrida*). Bloom time: spring. Columbine produces lacy foliage and showy flowers on wiry stems.

As a result of hybridization, the spurred flowers come in a wide range of colors. Foliage may fade somewhat after flowering and can be cut to the ground. Columbine prefers a cool, moist soil that is rich in organic matter and that has excellent drainage. If planted in the hotter areas of the state, locate them in medium shade. Leaf miner is a common pest.

**Common Sundrops** (*Oenothera fruticosa*). Bloom time: summer. Common sundrops grow 18 to 24 inches tall and have delicate, bright yellow flowers in the summer. Native to eastern North America, it tolerates dry soil but performs at its best given some soil moisture and full sun. Showy Evening Primrose (*Oenothera speciosa*) is native to the southeastern United States and has pink flowers. It can be invasive in moist, rich soil.

**Daylily** (*Hemerocallis* species and hybrids). Bloom time: summer. Daylily is the most popular perennial in Alabama. Individual flowers last only a day. However, it is possible for a sizable clump to be in bloom for several weeks because of the number of flowering stems and flower buds produced. While daylilies grow with little care, they respond to irrigation and fertilization. Plant in full sun or light shade and mulch. Hybridization has resulted in more than 20,000 cultivars.

**False Blue Indigo** (*Baptisia australis*). Bloom time: late spring. False blue indigo has beautiful blue- to gray-green, trifoliate leaves that emerge early in the spring to become a substantial-sized bush, often 3 to 4 feet tall and 4 feet wide. The indigo-blue, pealike flowers are born on 10- to 12-inch stalks that give way to 2½-inch brown pods in summer. Plant false blue indigo in full sun and well-drained soil; it is drought- and heat-tolerant when established. White wild indigo (*Baptisia alba*) is a similar species with white flowers; it blooms earlier in the spring.

**Foxglove** (*Digitalis purpurea*). Bloom time: spring. Foxglove, with its tall, flowering spikes and strong vertical lines, provides both emphasis and stateliness to perennial beds and borders. It will grow in some sun but performs best in light shade and consistent soil moisture. Some foxgloves flower the first year and are treated as annuals. *D. purpurea* is a self-seeding biennial that remains in the garden much like hollyhock. Foxglove is the source of the powerful drug digitalin, used to treat heart disease, therefore, no part of the plant should be eaten.

**Fragrant Solomon's Seal** (*Polygonatum odoratum*). Bloom time: spring. Fragrant Solomon's seal is a shade-loving, woodland plant, composed of long, graceful, unbranched shoots arising from underground runners. The flowers are pendulous in groups of one or two arising from the leaf nodes. Fragrant Solomon's seal grows best in moist soil amended with organic matter but will tolerate some drought. The cultivar 'Variegatum' has green leaves edged in cream white that are very effective in shady areas.

**Goldenrod** (*Solidago hybrids*). Bloom time: late summer. While goldenrod may be disdained by many who consider it little more than a weed, there are a number of hybrids developed mostly in Europe that may help change that image. The hybrids are excellent border plants that are more compact than wild types and provide a brilliant display of golden yellow blooms from late summer to fall. The widespread adaptability of the species is testimony to its hardiness and vigor. Goldenrod does not cause hay fever.

**Hosta or Plantain-lily** (*Hosta* species and cultivars). Bloom time: summer. As one writer explains, "Plants in this genus have a noble appeal; flowers and foliage connote grandeur when used in appropriate plantings." Many cultivars are available with varying

leaf patterns and coloration. Leaf texture may be smooth, ribbed, or seersucker and may be flat, wavy, or twisted. Leaf coloration includes light green, dark green, gray, and bluish-green. Variegated leaf forms are also available. As an added bonus, white or lilac lilylike flowers are born on stalks above the 1- to 3-foot foliage during the summer. Hostas perform best in shaded areas with moist, rich soils; however, some cultivars need some sun if foliage is to color properly.

### **Ice Plant** (*Delosperma cooperi*).

Bloom time: late spring. Ice plant is a low-growing ground cover with bright green, succulent foliage. The light purple to magenta, daisy-like flowers cover the plant in late spring and remain attractive for 4 to 6 weeks. Ice plants perform well in full sun and well-drained soil and are often planted on slopes or in rock gardens.

**Iris hybrids.** Bloom time: late spring to summer. Bearded Iris (*Iris* hybrids), Siberian Iris (*I. siberica*), and Japanese Iris (*I. kaempferi*) bloom in this order ranging in height from 2 to 4 feet with the flowers held high above the foliage. An almost endless array of colors is available in the bearded irises: blue, purples, and whites in the Siberian irises; primarily blues and purples in the Japanese irises. Bearded irises should be grown in full sun and require excellent drainage; Siberian and Japanese irises grow well in light shade and tolerate moist soils. Several bulbous iris species also grow well in Alabama.

### **Lavender Cotton and Green Lavender Cotton**

(*Santolina chaemaecypariis* and *S. virens*). Bloom time: summer. Both species are grown primarily for their foliage, silver-gray and bright green, respectively. Plants form a broad, spreading mound about 1½ feet tall and 3 feet wide. They are frequently used for edging. Both require full sun and well-drained soils.

**Lenten Rose** (*Helleborus orientalis*). Bloom time: late winter. Lenten rose is valued because of its unique time of bloom, February to March, and its long bloom season, 8 to 10 weeks. Plants are slow growing with leathery, dark green leaves that are attractive and evergreen. Growing 12 to 15 inches high, the nodding flowers are white with lavender shading fading to green. They are good cut flowers. *Helleborus* grows best in Alabama in shade or partial shade and average soil moisture.

**Moss Phlox** (*Phlox subulata*). Bloom time: early spring. Moss phlox, or thrift as it is commonly called in the South, is a low-growing, spreading perennial often seen growing on sand or clay banks, where it seems to thrive under dry and infertile conditions. Gardeners often select moss phlox for use in rock gardens because of its ability to thrive under adverse conditions and neglect. It does need well-drained soil and full sun to perform best. The needlelike foliage forms a dense, low mat of growth. Cultivars producing white, blue, or bicolor flowers are available in addition to the common pink. Woodland phlox (*P. divaricata*) is one of the few phlox species that will grow in shade.

**Obedient Plant or False Dragonhead** (*Physostegia virginiana*). Bloom time: summer. Obedient plant is another of the spike-flowering perennials that is easy to grow and does well in most areas of the state. Obedient plant has lavender flowers, although a white cultivar is available. The tubular flowers, arranged in rows on the spike, remain in place when they are pushed aside, giving the plant its name. It prefers moist soil or at least soils that do not dry out excessively. Plants grow from 3 to 7 feet tall and make good cut flowers.

**Orange Coneflower** (*Rudbeckia fulgida*). Bloom time: summer. Orange coneflower is one of the easiest perennials to grow. It

grows well in full sun or light shade and withstands dry soil conditions well once it is established. The dark-green, leathery foliage forms a basal clump from which arise 2- to 3-foot flower stalks in the summer with 2- to 3-inch yellow daisylike flowers with brown to purplish centers. Although not invasive, it will form dense clumps in rich soil.

**Pinks.** Maiden Pink (*Dianthus deltooides*), Cheddar Pink (*D. gratianopolitanus*), and Cottage Pink (*D. plumarius*). Bloom time: late spring. Pinks have long been a favorite perennial for use in rock gardens and as an edging plant for the bed or border. The low, spreading growth habit, grayish-green foliage, and fragrant carnationlike flowers make all species welcome additions to the garden. In South Alabama, plant pinks in full sun to part shade in well-drained soil. Plants may rebloom in the fall if spent flowers are removed. The foliage may be burned slightly by extremely hard freezes, but it recovers quickly.

### **Purple Coneflower**

(*Echinacea purpurea*). Bloom time: summer. Purple coneflower has striking flowers with purplish-pink petals that naturally droop surrounding a central bronzy cone. The tough, deep-green foliage contrasts nicely with the flower color. This native perennial grows to a height of 3 to 5 feet and performs well under hot and somewhat droughtlike conditions. A good butterfly attractant, this plant may require staking to support the heavy flowers. Mildew can be a problem on this plant. About a dozen cultivars are available, several with white flowers.

### **Red-Hot-Poker or Torch Lily**

(*Kniphofia uvaria*). Bloom time: late spring. Red-hot-poker forms heavy clumps of gray-green, sword-shaped leaves. The 3-foot flower spikes bear nodding, tubular, orange flowers. They generally do well in sunny locations, but protection from intense sunlight makes the flowers last longer.



Plant red-hot-pokers in humus-rich, well-drained soil, and do not allow them to become water-stressed while flower buds are forming. Division should be infrequent because they do not respond well to root disturbance. Cultivars are available with green, coral, yellow, red, scarlet, or bicolor flowers.

**Rose Campion** (*Lychnis coronaria*). Bloom time: late spring. The densely pubescent, grayish-white leaves and stems of rose campion contrast well with the rose-red, pink, or white flowers. Plants grow 2 to 3 feet tall in full sun and well-drained soil. Like many plants with pubescent foliage, they may rot in wet, humid weather. Rose campion may not be a long-term perennial; many die after several years but readily reseed in the landscape.

**Rose Mallow** (*Hibiscus moscheutos*). Bloom time: summer. Growing 3 to 8 feet tall, rose mallow produces incredible 6- to 12-inch diameter flowers in shades of white, pink, rose, red, or bicolor. Blooming from early summer to fall, rose mallow is somewhat coarse in appearance, but it can be used to advantage in the landscape. Do not confuse it with Rose of Sharon (*H. syriacus*), a woody deciduous shrub common in the landscape or with the tropical hibiscus (*H. rosa-sinensis*), which is not hardy in all parts of Alabama. Confederate Rose (*H. mutabilis*) is a large plant (up to 10 feet) with flowers that change color from white or pink to red as they age.

**Russian Sage** (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*). Bloom time: summer. Russian sage has proven itself to be a durable garden performer. Plants grow 4 to 5 feet tall and about as wide and are covered with delicate, blue-green, pungent foliage. Tubular, light-blue flowers cover the branches in whorls in the summer. Plants may bloom for 2 to 3 months. Russian sage grows best in full sun and good soil drainage. Plants can be cut back to 12 to 18 inches above the ground in early spring to control plant size.

**Sage** (*Salvia farinacea* and *S. H superba*). Bloom time: early summer. Mealy-cup sage offers blue or white flowers that contrast with grayish stems. These colors provide a relief from the more conventional hot colors such as red and orange. Individual plants send out several branches reaching 15 to 20 inches in height. Each branch produces a terminal flower spike. Both of these perennial salvias tolerate dry conditions fairly well.

**Sedum** (*Sedum H 'Autumn Joy'*). Bloom time: late summer. There are dozens of Sedum species cultivated that vary tremendously in growth habit. This cultivar is among the showiest. Flower colors range from white to pink. Blooming in late summer till frost, plants are effective as single specimens or in small groups. Heights range from 1½ to 2 feet. Full sun or light shade is satisfactory, but well-drained soil is essential.

**Shasta Daisy** (*Leucanthemum H superbum*). Bloom time: late spring to summer. Shasta daisies have large (2 to 6 inches), white, daisylike flowers in late spring. The leaves are dark green and straplike and, in many cultivars, have coarsely toothed margins. More than two dozen cultivars are available, ranging from 8 to 12 inches to 3 to 4 feet. Plant shasta daisies in full sun and well-drained soil with consistent moisture and fertility. Part shade is best if plants will be exposed to heat and drought. Plants gradually die out in the center over 2 to 3 years and benefit from dividing and replanting.

**Speedwell** (*Veronica spicata*). Bloom time: summer. Colorful flower spikes are the trademark of speedwell. You will find various cultivars available that produce blue or white flower spikes at the ends of branches, from June to August. The spiky blue flowers can be used effectively in perennial borders. *V. repens* is a very low-growing, mat-forming type with evergreen foliage.

**Spike Gayfeather** (*Liatris spicata*). Bloom time: summer. Spike gayfeather produces tall flower spikes 3 to 4 feet high. Flower colors range from rose-lavender to pink and white. They respond to moist, well-drained soils in full sun or light shade, and they are very heat tolerant. They do, however, survive in drier sites but need moisture during the flowering period. Remove spent flower spikes to encourage secondary flowering. The flowers are excellent as fresh or dried flowers.

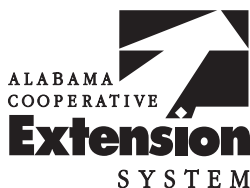
**Stoke's Aster** (*Stokesia laevis*). Bloom time: late spring. Stoke's aster, one of the hardiest perennials grown in Alabama, withstands dry conditions well. Plants are low growing initially, stretching from 15 to 18 inches at blooming time. The most common variety produces light blue flowers; however, some varieties produce white or rose-colored flowers. Plants may begin blooming in May and continue blooming sporadically into October. Plant in well-drained locations. The plants like full sun but will grow in partial shade. Removing spent flower spikes prolongs the blooming season.

**Tickseed Coreopsis** (*Coreopsis grandiflora*). Bloom time: summer. Tickseed coreopsis is a highly praised garden perennial that produces yellow, daisylike flowers from summer into fall if the old flowers are removed. They grow best in full sun and are fairly drought tolerant, but they may require irrigation during prolonged dry weather. Coreopsis is among the easiest perennials to grow but is often short lived. Thread leaf coreopsis (*Coreopsis verticillata*) is a longer lasting perennial with very fine-textured foliage and yellow flowers throughout the summer. The cultivar 'Zagreb' (golden yellow flowers) may be a more reliable perennial than the cultivar 'Moonbeam' (lemon yellow flowers), especially in South Alabama.

**Verbena.** Clump Verbena (*Verbena canadensis*) and Moss Verbena (*V. Tenuisecta*). Bloom time: summer. Clump and moss verbenas are many-branched, low-growing plants that bloom from late spring into late summer. They are both southeastern native plants. Clump verbena has larger leaves with toothed margins and comes in lavender, red, pinks, white, or bicolor flowers. Moss verbena has fine, dissected foliage with flowers in purple, pink, or white. Both plants grow well in full sun and well-drained soil.

**Wormwood** (*Artemisia* x 'Powis Castle'). Bloom time: late summer, but insignificant. Wormwoods are a large group of plants grown in perennial gardens for their beautiful silver-gray, fine-textured foliage. The cultivar 'Powis Castle' has a spreading mound growth habit that blends well in almost any setting. Another wormwood commonly available is *Artemisia ludoviciana* 'Silver King.' Though a beautiful foliage plant and a dependable perennial, it can spread with reckless abandon. Wormwoods generally tolerate dry, poor soil in full sun or part shade. These plants may develop rot problems in shade and high humidity.

**Yarrow.** Coronation Gold Yarrow (*Achillea* x 'Coronation Gold'), Fern-leaf Yarrow (*Achillea filipendulina*), and Common Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*). Bloom Time: late spring. Coronation Gold Yarrow has gray-green, fernlike foliage at the base and clusters of yellow flowers in a flat-top head on 2- to 4-foot stalks. Fern-like Yarrow is similar to Coronation Gold Yarrow but grows taller and has greener foliage. Common Yarrow grows like a prostrate ground cover and has red, pink, or white flowers. Yarrows tolerate drought and infertile soils in full sun and make excellent cut or dried flowers.



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