

Perennials for Next Summer

By Susan Camp

There is no doubt that fall is approaching very quickly. The days are growing noticeably shorter and the temperature has dropped a few degrees. Kids started back to school this week, after a Labor Day weekend of perfect weather. Gardeners are noticing that their perennials look straggly, with yellowing leaves and drying seedheads.

For me, it is time to take stock of this summer's garden and decide which perennials worked well, which deserve another chance, and which should go. The dainty, pink Echinacea 'Butterfly Kisses' that performed poorly last summer tripled in size this year and gets a thumb's up, as do the deep burgundy coreopsis 'Mercury Rising' and the bright yellow 'Moonshine' yarrow. The three sad-looking patchoulis I planted in May have taken off, but the second batch of lavender plants is a disappointment. And so it goes for the gardener.

The bright side of the fall garden assessment is that local nurseries and garden centers are receiving shipments of perennials every week and summer leftovers with the potential to make it through the winter and flourish next spring are available at sale prices. Fall gardening catalogs are arriving as well, with promises to ship at the right time for fall planting.

One of my favorite perennials is Russian sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*), with its graceful, silvery-green stems and delicate lavender to purple blossoms. 'Blue Jean Baby' is a shorter variety that reaches 28-34 inches in height and blooms from July through September. 'Blue Jean Baby' is less floppy than taller varieties. The flowers are a dusky purple. Russian sage requires full sun and well-drained soil. It is deer and drought resistant. Cut Russian sage back to 8 to 12 inches in early spring. If the winter is very cold, the plants may die back to the ground, but will reappear as the temperature rises. Plant 'Blue Jean Baby' 30 inches apart in odd-numbered groupings for maximum dramatic effect. Elton John fans might want to combine this lovely plant with the 30 to 36-inch *Perovskia* 'Rocketman.'

Speaking of dramatic effect, the daylily (*Hemerocallis* spp.) 'Cherokee Star' is a big, bold, cherry-red beauty with a bright yellow throat. Plant height is 32 inches and flowers reach 7 inches across. Daylilies need full sun to part shade, blooming from July through August. If they are grown in full shade, the plants will become leggy with decreased flowering. They prefer sandy, well-drained soil and are drought tolerant. Few insect pests attack daylilies, but deer love them. Varieties of *Liatris*, *Rudbeckia*, and *Echinacea* are good companions for daylilies.

Echinacea is a favorite perennial to liven up a garden space. Earlier, I mentioned the dainty 'Butterfly Kisses', which is great for a small area, but if you seek a more flamboyant look in your garden, try 'Mama Mia', with pink, coral, and red-orange petals. 'Mama Mia' reaches 20 to 28 inches and blooms from June through September. Space plants 24 to 30 inches apart in full sun. Flower heads are 3 to 4 inches in diameter and last up to two weeks, making 'Mama Mia' a vibrant addition to summer flower arrangements. Coneflowers like sandy, well-drained soils and can survive hot, dry conditions. They are deer resistant. Seedheads can be left on the plants during the winter, providing food for finches and other birds. *Echinacea* is difficult to transplant,

because of a long taproot. It rarely needs to be divided. Perovskia, Salvias, and Monarda (bee balm) are good companion plants.

The advantage of planting perennials in the fall is that the plants will establish themselves over the winter and be ready to take off when spring arrives. The Missouri Botanical Garden “Plant Finder” contains entries on many varieties of popular perennials appropriate for planting in our region.

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