


MESSENGER-INQUIRER

	University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food and Environment Cooperative Extension Service
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March 11, 2023

Think about Fall Flowering Perennials in the Spring
By Annette Meyer Heisdorffer, Ph.D.

The landscape bursts with flowers in the spring, but what about in late summer and fall? Chrysanthemums add color, but what other flowering plants are available? There are several fall-blooming perennials that add color to the landscape. You may want to add these to your plant list for the spring. Remember, perennial plants live from year to year.

A unique perennial, which is fun to watch grow and bloom in the late summer, is showy sedum (*Sedum spectabile*). The foliage is thick and fleshy with silvery-green leaves. At first, a green mound of foliage appears. As the plant grows, it increases in height. The final height ranges from 18 to 24 inches tall depending on the cultivar and it keeps its mounding growth habit. As the flowers form, it looks like little branches appear at the top of the plant. In bloom, the flower heads are 3- to 6-inches wide. Flower colors available are red, pink, or ivory-white depending on the cultivar. Showy sedum flowers attract butterflies which gather nectar from the blossoms. The flowers persist in the garden through early fall. Showy sedum flowers can be used in fresh or dried floral arrangements.

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Showy sedum requires little maintenance. Well-drained soil is necessary because it rots in poorly-drained soil. This plant will grow in full sun or light shade. The taller cultivars may require staking to keep the stems from falling over if planted in an area receiving constant wind.

Russian sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*) is a past Perennial Plant Association's Plant of the Year. It is covered with small, lavender-blue flowers beginning in late July through September. The tubular flowers appear along 12- to 15-inch stems that are produced above the foliage. The height of the plant may range from 3 to 5 feet tall depending on the cultivar. Russian sage performs best in full sun and in well-drained soil. The gray-white foliage and the long period of bloom make this plant very desirable. The foliage adds interest to the garden through winter. If the foliage is left over the winter in the garden, it should be cut back in the spring. When the leaf is crushed, it has a pungent odor that reminds me of sage.

Joe Pye weed (*Eutrochium purpureum*), a native to Kentucky, blooms from July through September. The dense flower heads form at the end of stems and are made up of tiny .33-inch pink-purple flowers. The plant reaches 2 to 7 feet in height depending on the growing conditions and the cultivar. The plant grows 2 to 4 feet wide. It prefers moist soil and full sun to part shade. It is a good plant to grow in rain gardens as well.

Japanese anemone (*Anemone x hybrida*) starts to bloom in late summer and fall. This plant prefers well-drained soil and can tolerate partial shade. The foliage forms a low-growing mound which may reach about 12 inches in height depending on the cultivar. The tall flower stems allow the blossoms to gracefully tower over the foliage and give a light, airy feeling to the landscape. During flowering, the plant height may range from 2 to 4 feet depending on the

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cultivar. The flower stems contain several blossoms per stem. Flower colors include white, pink, and rose. Two good cultivars of the Japanese anemone are September Charm and Honorine Jobert.

Frikart's aster (*Aster x frikartii*) blooms in late summer to fall. The flowers are 2 to 3 inches across. The flower color may be lavender to lavender-blue with a yellow center. Frikart's aster prefers well-drained soil and full sun. The plant height ranges from 2 to 3 feet and may require staking to keep them from falling over. Large groupings of Frikart's aster make a visual impact in the garden. When it begins blooming, the flowers attract butterflies and pollinators.

Michaelmas daisy or New York aster (*Aster novi-belgii*) add color in the late summer and fall. The flower colors for this perennial aster include violet, white, lavender-blue, and blue. The flowers are small, about 0.75 to 1 inch wide, and form a cluster which makes it look like a head. Cultivars with larger flowers are available. The height of the plant ranges from 1 to 6 feet depending on the cultivar. The taller cultivars may require staking to keep them from falling over. This aster grows best in full sun and well-drained soil. Butterflies are attracted to this one also.

For a location with shade, toad lily, (*Tricyrtis hirta*) would add color. It blooms in late summer to fall. The flowers have a white background with purple spots. The flowers are about 1 inch long and described as lily-like or orchid-like. The arching stems reach 2 to 3 feet tall and spread 1.5 to 2 feet wide. The flowers appear toward the ends of the stems. These flowers are

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best observed up close due to their size. This plant prefers well-drained but moisture-retentive soil high in organic matter.

For more information about perennials that bloom in late summer and fall, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu.

Annette's tip:

As the daffodils (*Narcissus*) bloom in your landscape, take photos and place a label by them now. It is easy to forget where they are located. Crowded bulbs with reduced number of flowers need to be divided after the foliage dies, ideally in late June through August, and replanted.

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