

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



March 2, 2024

Specific Annuals and Perennials Tolerate Heat and Dry Conditions

Finding flowering plants that tolerate heat is challenging. Who knows what temperatures plants will encounter during the summer. However, beautiful blossoms will still appear in the garden by including some annuals, which live for one season, and perennials, which return year after year, that grow in hot dry conditions. The plants described below grow in full sun and require less water.

Periwinkle or vinca (*Catharanthus roseus*) is an annual that will flower throughout the summer, even under hot, dry growing conditions. This plant does not like to be over watered and needs well-drained soil. Periwinkle will begin to rot if the soil stays too wet.

The height of periwinkle ranges from 12 to 18 inches. Many attractive flowers cover the plant continuously. The flowers range in size from 1.5 to 2.5 inches across, depending on cultivar. The wide variety of flower colors includes shades of pink, shades of purple, white, orchid, and apricot. Many cultivars have the center of the flower or "eye" one color and the petals another. The two colors in the periwinkle flower make it fun and challenging to coordinate with other flowers.

A trailing plant habit is available in periwinkle too. Look for the two different series called Cascade™ or Mediterranean.

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Zinnia angustifolia is an annual flowering plant that loves the sun and tolerates heat and drought. This plant is covered with 1.5- to 2-inch flowers throughout summer. The flower colors include white, orange, and golden yellow. The plant height may range from 8 to 14 inches tall and spread about 8 to 10 inches wide depending on the cultivar. The leaves are thin and narrow. *Zinnia angustifolia* is disease-resistant to some leaf diseases, which is another attractive characteristic. 'Crystal White' is a cultivar with white flowers and was selected as an award winner in bedding plant trials for its outstanding performance.

Moss rose (*Portulaca grandiflora*) is a low-growing annual that thrives in sunny, dry conditions. The plant height ranges from 4 to 8 inches tall with a greater spread. The leaves are very narrow, thick, and succulent. Flowers of moss rose are 1 to 2 inches across. The flower colors include white, yellow, purple, pink, fuchsia, orange, scarlet, cream, and bicolored. Single or double flower forms are available. Moss rose blooms may close during part of the day, depending on the cultivar. The blossoms of many newer cultivars remain open all day. Moss rose may come back next year because it re-seeds itself.

Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) is a large perennial plant 3 to 5 feet in height, including the flower stem. Depending on the cultivar, the flowers are reddish, purple, white, or lavender-pink. It blooms from summer until frost. The flower, or the cone with the petals removed, adds interest to fresh arrangements. The cone can also be dried. Coneflower tolerates a wide range of soil conditions. Butterflies are attracted to this plant.

The cultivar of the coneflower called Magnus was a Perennial Plant of the year. The flowers of 'Magnus' are an intense rose-pink color and the petals do not droop. This plant reaches 3 feet tall.

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Meadow sage (*Salvia x superba* or *Salvia nemerosa*), which is a perennial, blooms in late spring and throughout the summer. The flowers are produced on spikes. Meadow sage tolerates heat and drought conditions. The height of this plant ranges from 18 to 24 inches tall. Violet, pink, and blue flower colors are available.

The cultivar May Night (Mainacht) was selected by the Perennial Plant Association as a Perennial Plant of the Year. It grows about 18 inches tall and has deep purple flowers. Another good cultivar is Blue Queen, which has pretty, intense blue-violet flowers and reaches 18 to 24 inches tall.

Showy sedum (*Sedum spectabile*) is a unique perennial for fall bloom. The foliage is thick and fleshy. The leaves are silvery-green in color. Plant height ranges from 18 to 24 inches tall and has a mound growth habit. The 3- to 6-inch wide flower heads form at the end of the stems. The flower colors available are red, pink, and ivory-white. Showy sedum flowers attract butterflies, which gather nectar from the blossoms. The flowers can be used fresh or dried in floral arrangements. This low maintenance plant needs well-drained soil to avoid rotting. Showy sedum will grow in full sun or light shade.

Dragon's blood stonecrop (*Sedum spurium* 'Dragon's Blood') is a perennial with thick burgundy leaves. It even provides winter interest since the leaves remain on the plant. The low-growing sedum is 3 to 6 inches tall. It spreads 1 to 1.5 feet wide. In mid-summer through autumn, pink to red flowers about .75 inch in diameter appear above the mat of foliage.

For more information about flowering plants that can tolerate heat, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu.

Annette's Tip:

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It is time to cut back the foliage on ornamental grasses to about 4 to 6 inches because new growth is starting. Once the new growth starts, it is hard to remove the brown stems without cutting the new growth.

Upcoming Event:

“High Tunnel Production in Kentucky: Growing Cool Season Crops During Winter in the Backyard” will be presented by Kevin Collard, horticulturalist, at the Daviess County Extension Services Office at 1:00 p.m. Tuesday, March 5. The program is co-sponsored with the Green River Area Extension Master Gardener Association. All are welcome to attend.

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