

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



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Perennials Add Interest to the Garden throughout the Season
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How can I have colorful blooms in my garden throughout the growing season? Planting a variety of flowering perennials highlights areas of the garden.

Perennial plants return year after year. They require some maintenance, such as dividing as they grow over time. Compared to annual bedding plants, perennials bloom for a shorter period but have other interesting characteristics.

Lungwort, *Pulmonaria*, has attractively spotted leaves and prefers the shade. The funnel-shaped, drooping flowers appear in early spring. Flower buds are a shade of pink that open into a shade of blue. Some cultivars may have white or coral-red flowers without turning blue. After the plants bloom, the leaves create interest for the rest of the year. The irregularly shaped spots are gray to white in color on a green background. Depending on the cultivar, plant height ranges from 12 to 20 inches with an equal spread. Lungwort is a good plant to use in combination with hostas. Lungwort performs best if it has adequate moisture throughout the year.

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A favorite easy to grow perennial is *Dianthus gratianopolitanus* 'Feuerhexe' ('Firewitch'), which has bright pink flowers in the spring. A mat of fragrant blossoms is formed in well-drained soil and full sun. The plant grows 8 inches in height with a spread of one foot. 'Feuerhexe' gracefully spreads over retaining walls and on sloped areas. It requires little care and tolerates drought and humidity once established. This plant reblooms many times as long as the seed pods are continually removed.

For a shady garden, Chinese astilbe, *Astilbe chinensis* var. *pumila*, is attractive with tiny, lilac-pink flowers packed into an upright, branched flower stalk in a plume-like manner. It blooms in early summer. The flower stalk rises 1 foot above delicate-looking, dark green, fern-like leaves. As long as the soil is kept moist, it remains charming throughout the growing season. It is a good ground cover at 8 to 10 inches tall in borders, shade gardens, rock gardens, along pond or stream banks, and woodland areas.

Cranesbill, *Geranium* 'Gerwat' (Rozanne), is an attention getter. It forms a 20-inch tall mound of 1.5-inch diameter violet-blue flowers with purple violet veins and small white centers. The leaves are deeply cut and green. This plant shows heat tolerance through non-stop flowering from May until frost. Occasionally, in the hottest part of the summer, cranesbill may stop blooming for a short time. 'Gerwat' is happiest in part afternoon shade with moisture available. This cranesbill is a very nice cultivar for patio planters, hanging baskets, borders, and cottage gardens.

Bergenia or pigsqueak, *Bergenia cordifolia*, is another perennial for shady areas. This plant prefers partial shade and moist soil conditions. The pink or red colored flowers appear in

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the spring in clusters on top of thick stalks. The large, glossy, and thick evergreen leaves turn red or bronze during the winter. The interesting winter foliage is an added bonus for this plant. *Bergenia* ranges from 1 to 2 feet in height.

Use *Phlox paniculata* 'Robert Poore' when needing a tall plant in a full sun garden. Tall phlox grows 4 to 5 feet high. 'Robert Poore' blooms in early summer in beautiful clusters of deep magenta. This cultivar is mildew resistant but needs good air circulation and plenty of moisture. It may require staking.

Russian sage, *Perovskia atriplicifolia*, performs best in full sun and well-drained soil. It has small, lavender-blue flowers beginning in August. The tubular flowers appear along 12- to 15-inch stems above the foliage. The height of the plant may range from 3 to 5 feet. The gray-white foliage and the long blooming period make this plant very desirable. Also, the foliage adds winter interest to the garden. If the foliage is left over the winter in the garden, it should be cut back in the spring.

Showy sedum, *Hyotelephium spectabile* (formerly *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 with a mounding growth habit. The 3- to 6-inch-wide flower heads form at the end of the stems. The available flower colors 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.

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Japanese anemone, *Anemone x hybrida*, blooms in late summer and fall. This plant prefers a well-drained soil and tolerates 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 cultivar. The flower stems contain several blossoms per stem. Flower colors include white, pink, and rose. Two good cultivars of Japanese anemone are September Charm and Honorine Jobert.

For more information about beautiful flowering perennial plants for your garden, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu.

Annette's Tips:

Look for these plants locally first. Watch for plant sales by garden clubs and the Western Kentucky Botanical Garden. Then look in catalogs and online.

Continue to watch the weather for freezing temperatures. Be prepared to cover or protect tender plants that are outside in pots or in the ground.

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