Hot Perennials

It seems as though this summer just gets hotter and hotter. Lately I have been looking for the first flight to Alaska to look for an igloo! As many of you know, I am a Yankee, and I do not do heat very well. I am told that eventually this heat will dissipate and cooler weather will reign supreme. Until that time, I will race from my air conditioning in my home, to my car, and into my office. While I may not fare so well in the heat of the summer, there is hope for our gardens.

Perennial gardening is a subtle art that can be gorgeous from early spring right up until the frosts in the fall. Many homeowners today are looking for the instant gratification of color, splash, and show from their gardens. They forget about the perennials that can offer extended shows of not only color, but also texture and shape.

The heat we have experienced over the last few weeks has done a number on many of the colorful annual flowers around town. Why not consider replacing the annuals with a few different perennial flowers? There are many perennials that have great color, can survive the harsh sun and heat of late summer, and will bloom well into fall.

Blackeyed Susan (Rudbeckia fulgida) is a hardy perennial in this area that takes full sun to part shade. A typical daisy shaped flower with a black center and yellow petals, it can grow from 18-30 inches high and blooms in the late summer. If you are quick, and cut it back just after it finishes blooming, you may experience a smaller encore bloom in late fall.

Blanket flower (Gaillardia X grandiflora) is another daisy like flower, but has distinct yellow and red coloring to the petals. It is a long flowering perennial that does well in full sun. It is a great option for sandy dry areas as it is naturalized on the coastal dunes.

Hardy ageratum (Eupatorium coelestinum) will offer your garden a splash of blue within all the yellow and reds. It will flower from late summer up until the first frost in a moist, poorly drained area with full sun to part shade.

Lantana (Lantana camera) is probably my favorite perennial. This is truly a set it and forget it kind of plant. It takes full sun, tolerates drought, and will flower from summer
through the fall. There are a few new variegated color varieties that are a little less hardy, but the ‘Miss Huff’ variety is well known to survive our winters.

Red is known to attract hummingbirds, but if you are having problems with other insects visiting your feeder, stay away from the color yellow. Yellow is known to attract insects such as bees and wasps. Bee guards are a feature to look for when purchasing your feeder. Also, some feeders have ant moats built into their design just above the main portion of the feeder. If yours is not one of those, a peanut butter jar lid turned upside-down with a screw or an eyebolt to hang from will work just as well.

While hanging a feeder will definitely get you on your way to viewing the Ruby-throated Hummingbird, flowers will help even more. These beautiful creatures love anything red, but bright pinks, roses, oranges, and purples will also entice them. They seem to prefer the nectar from tubular flowers, such as crossvine, Carolina jessamine, and red buckeye, but also love bee balm, columbine, fushia, foxglove, snapdragon, geranium, sage, verbena, and many more. Plant a perennial garden just for the birds, or create a beautiful patio using potted plants and hanging baskets. Ruby-throated hummingbirds are very curious creatures, and will investigate any source of food even if it is close to a house. Hummingbirds have even been photographed resting on a person’s hand.

So, enjoy the hummingbird season while it lasts. We should continue to see the hummers until about October. So, while they are here, fill your feeders, and get dirty planting your hummingbird gardens!

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