



Choose Drought Tolerant Perennials for Hot, Dry Conditions

With the excessive heat and lack of rainfall recently, it may seem nearly impossible to grow a lush, beautiful garden. But it is possible if you choose perennials that, once established, not only tolerate drought but thrive in these conditions.

Two early flowering perennials are creeping phlox and basket of gold. Both of these plants are low-growing creepers that provide welcome masses of brilliant color from mid-April through the end of May. They combine nicely with spring blooming bulbs; look beautiful on slopes or spilling over a wall; and is a lovely edging for the perennial border.

Creeping phlox is available in shades of pink, lavender, red, and white. Basket of gold glows an eye-catching yellow. Both benefit from a shearing after they have finished flowering.

Common thrift, or sea pink, flowers in May to June and produce lots of small, globe-like flowers in shades of lilac, rose and white over a thick mound of grassy evergreen foliage. It only grows up to six inches tall and works well as an edging, in the rock garden, or even in the gaps between stepping stones. The flowers are good for cutting and can be used fresh or dried.

Rock soapwort blooms from May into July or August. It grows from six to nine inches tall, produces many sprays of bright pink flowers over tiny green leaves, and forms a loose mat that spreads up to two feet wide. It is an excellent choice for the rock garden or as a ground cover.

For spectacular flowers, few plants can beat Oriental poppies. Their large, showy single or double flowers in May and June come in shades of red, orange, pink and white. There are varieties that grow from sixteen inches to three feet tall. The entire plant disappears after flowering so interplant them with annuals or other drought tolerant, but later-to-emerge perennials like baby's breath to fill in the gap.



Yarrows begin to flower in June and continue throughout the summer if spent flowers are deadheaded. They are extremely hardy and thrive in any well-drained soil that is not too fertile. Their flowers, held in clusters to form large, flat heads, can be white, pink, yellow, lavender, orange, or red. Some of the older varieties had lax stems that sometimes flopped. Look for the newer varieties with strong stems that never need staking.

Perennial salvias also begin blooming in early summer. They produce an abundance of flower spikes in shades of rose, blue and purple and range in height from fifteen inches to three feet. Salvias are gorgeous when planted in mass and make the yellow or bright pink flowers of companions pop.

Sundrops begin blooming in June and continue through most of the summer, producing lots of bright yellow, poppy-like flowers that are followed by large, winged seedpods. They grow six to twelve inches tall making them good choices for massing, edging, and rock gardens.

Blanket flower blooms heaviest in June, but will continue to bloom sporadically into September. Its flowers are brightly colored daisies in combinations of red and yellow. Plant these in the border or in containers.

In July, the bright orange flowers butterfly weed begin to bloom. A North American native, it attracts butterflies and bees and naturalizes easily in a well drained, hot spot in the garden. The flowers can also be cut for floral arrangements, and the seedpods that follow work well in dried arrangements. Butterfly weed is late to break dormancy in the spring. It may be wise to mark its spot so you don't accidentally cultivate it out during a late spring clean up.



Sedum, or stonecrop, is a star in the hot, dry garden. There are many varieties to choose from – some low growing types perfect for rock gardens, edging, or spilling over the edge of a rock wall; some taller varieties that combine nicely with coneflowers, black-eyed Susans and ornamental grasses.

All sedums have star-like flowers and succulent stems and leaves. Flowers may be yellow, white, pink, or red. Foliage may be green, blue, bronze, or reddish-purple.

Coneflowers and black-eyed Susans are both popular daisy-flowered perennials that are drought tolerant. They both begin flowering in mid summer and continue until frost.

Russian sage blooms at the same time as coneflowers and black-eyed Susans and look fabulous when planted alongside. The tall, airy stature of Russian sage contrasts nicely with its neighbor's coarse texture. The small flowers of Russian sage are a soft violet-blue; the foliage is gray and very fragrant.

When the temperatures remain high and the amount of rainfall is low, we may have to head inside for some air conditioning, but our borders filled with drought tolerant perennials will remain lush and lovely.



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