



Choose Easy-to-Care-For Perennials for Small Yards or Busy Lifestyles

Today's smaller yards and busy lifestyles send us to our local garden centers looking for well-behaved, neat and tidy plants. We want plants that are easy to care for and have pretty flowers, compact growth habits, and attractive foliage all season long.

For lovely foliage and easy care, lady's mantle is hard to beat. It grows just 12 to 18 inches tall and can be used for small groupings or edging the front of a partly shaded border.



Its scalloped, grayish-green leaves are covered with soft down that catches raindrops or the morning dew. In early summer, plants send up sprays of tiny, yellow-green flowers. These can be cut and used like baby's breath in bouquets.

Lady's mantle is easy to grow and prefers light shade. It will tolerate a sunnier spot if given additional moisture. It often self sows to form a charming colony.

Summer Beauty Allium is a long-flowering member of the allium family. Lilac-colored flower globes bloom from June to August above tidy tufts of upright, flattened, dark green foliage. Don't deadhead it; instead, leave seed heads standing for winter interest.

The foliage of Summer Beauty Allium pushes itself from the ground early in spring and looks fresh until frost. Plant this drought-tolerant perennial in a sunny spot with good drainage and it will call your garden home for many years.

Consider Carpathian bellflower. It grows just 6 to 8 inches tall and has bright green foliage that grows in a compact, mounding habit. This little cutie is suitable for edging a mostly sunny border or a rock garden. From June to August, it boasts abundant quantities of cup-shaped flowers. Pearl Deep Blue has dark blue flowers; Pearl White has white.

Both are heat tolerant and only ask for a spot with well-drained soil, light mulch, and maybe a little protection from the hottest part of the day.

Leadwort is an outstanding, late-blooming perennial that should be included in an easy-to-care-for landscape. It only grows 8 to 12 inches tall with glossy dark green foliage. As the weather cools in fall, leadwort's leaves turn scarlet-red. Cobalt blue flowers appear from mid-August through October.

The only thing this plant dislikes is to be wet in winter so be sure it's planted in a well-drained sunny spot. Leadwort is slow to emerge in the spring so be patient for its initial appearance.



Threadleaf Coreopsis is another long-blooming, reliable perennial. A sun-lover, it tolerates drought while producing masses of small daisy-like flowers over fine-textured foliage. Moonbeam has lemon yellow flowers; Zagreb sports golden yellow flowers. The blooms of Sienna Sunset are orange overlaid with burnt sienna.

Threadleaf Coreopsis is beautiful when partnered with blue-flowering perennial salvias and ornamental grasses. It is a vigorous grower that tolerates less-than-perfect soils as long as they are well drained.

Cranesbills, or perennial geraniums, come in various forms and heights, but many are low and clump forming with attractive foliage. They grow in full sun to light shade and are adaptable to most soils, provided they have good drainage.

Bigroot geraniums grow from 8 to 15 inches tall. Fleshy roots allow this plant to absorb water and nutrients so it is one of the easiest of the geraniums to grow. Their gray-green, fragrant foliage forms a dense, weed-proof mat.

Bevan's Variety has deep magenta flowers in June; Ingwersen's Variety blooms white flushed with pink in June and July; and Spessart shows off white flowers in early June.



Coral bells are admired for their lovely, scalloped or ruffled foliage that forms a compact mound in a range of colors from dark green to chartreuse and red to purple, often with contrasting markings or variegation.

Coral bells prefer to be planted in a spot with afternoon shade in moist, but well drained, organic soil. A light layer of mulch is also appreciated. My personal favorite is Obsidian. Its satiny, deep purple leaves are dark and sensuous – stunning planted in combination with Japanese painted fern and Halcyon Hosta.

If you always wanted black-eyed Susans in your landscape, but just didn't have the room, try Viette's Little Suzy. It only grows to 24 inches tall but packs a powerful blooming punch of golden yellow flowers from June to September. Don't deadhead all the flowers and the birds will thank you for a winter snack.

Resistant to Septoria leaf spot, the foliage is attractive all season long. Plant Viette's Little Suzy in well-drained soil in full sun. It forms a lovely scene planted with ornamental grasses and Neon Sedum.

And speaking of Neon Sedum – my last pick for the small, easy-to-care-for garden – it blooms with intense, electric deep pink flowers in September and October.

It grows about 18 inches tall with attractive, lush foliage all season. It tolerates drought, heat, and humidity.

If you think your lot is too small or you just don't have time to maintain a beautiful landscape, think again. Just choose some compact-growing, low maintenance perennials and get gardening!



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