



Good Bedfellows Ensure a Bloom-Filled Garden

Some plants fall into the must-have category. Consider the incredible burst of color poppies add to a garden – clearer reds and oranges are hard to find in the perennial palette.

To do without these beauties simply because they retreat into dormancy after their early summer bloom is unthinkable. But I think everyone would agree the shriveling crown that defines *Papaver orientalis* is unsightly. So what's a gardener to do?

Garden gaps can be minimized by anticipating a plant's growth pattern and bloom time. Match them to later-flowering companions with similar growth requirements and they will fill these gaps.

Planting these briefly beautiful perennials in the right spot is especially important to ensure their health during their dormant period to guarantee their return for future seasons.

Perennial poppies are a fairly undemanding example of a 'briefly beautiful' perennial. With plenty of sun and well-drained soil, poppies add explosions of color to the early summer scene. Preferring to remain undisturbed year after year, poppies are definitely low-maintenance plants in the perennial garden.

The challenge is to find a suitable bedfellow that reaches its blooming peak later in the season – a plant with similar growing conditions and with enough heft to hide the dormant poppy crown, but not so large that it engulfs the poppy as it winds down.

A plant with an upright growth habit would be best, so lax leaves don't smother the poppy. Candidates should also be drought tolerant so excessively moist conditions don't rot the poppy's crown.

Coneflowers are an excellent choice. They're upright, low maintenance, and have an especially long bloom time. Black-eyed Susans are another option; Veronicas would also fit the bill.



Daffodils are another example of a brief beauty. Their gorgeous flowers define spring for most of us. Unfortunately, their sunny blooms fade a lot faster than their supporting foliage - which seems to hang on endlessly.

There are few sights in the landscape as depressing as yellowing daffodil foliage. Yet we know bulbs need these wilting leaves to help store nutrients for next year's bloom.

The solution can be simple: daylilies. Daylilies are perfect bedfellows for daffodils. There are varieties that bloom from early to late summer, and their expanding foliage hides declining daffodils very nicely.

Daylilies require very little maintenance. They form large clumps at just about the same rate as naturalizing daffodils. This happy coincidence of timing means that both will need dividing and replanting at the same time – every 3 to 4 years – right after the daylilies having finished blooming for the season.

Select several different types of daylilies with progressive bloom times, and you will enjoy their flowers from May through September.

Ornamental grasses are also fine companions for early-blooming bulbs. Most grasses emerge later in spring. Their fresh green grass blades thicken to camouflage the declining foliage of bulbs. Grasses require little supplemental water – the same cultural condition preferred by dormant bulbs.



Bleeding hearts is an old-fashioned favorite and my personal favorite in the spring garden. It emerges early; grows the size of a small shrub; and normally is at its peak bloom in early May. But by the end of July, *Dicentra* 'Spectabilis' usually disappears leaving a black hole in the shade border.

There are other varieties of *Dicentra* that remain in the garden, but I love the old-fashioned type. By planting compatible bedfellows, I enjoy their brief but beautiful presence.

Bugbane has fern-like foliage and delicate white flower spires. Turtlehead boasts glossy, dark green leaves and rosy pink flowers. Both share the same growing requirements and are large enough to make up for the loss of the bleeding heart.

Some must-have perennials have fleeting, but traffic-stopping bloom times. Think of peonies, clematis and members of the iris family.

They charm us when they are in bloom, but then they lack visual appeal the rest of the season. The answer is lilies.



Asiatic, Oriental, and species lilies are easy-to-grow bulbs that are small enough to tuck in just about anywhere. Their large flowers contribute a punch of color wherever you need it.

Asiatic lilies generally bloom first in June and July. Fragrant Oriental lilies bloom toward the end of the summer. Planted in tandem with any of the large foliage mass perennials, lilies enhance the beauty of every garden.

Clever planning can compensate for seasonal gaps. As long as their growing requirements are the same, perennial bedfellows will ensure a bloom-filled garden all season long.



Diana Stoll is a horticulturist and the garden center manager at The Planter's Palette, 28W571 Roosevelt Rd., Winfield, IL 60190. Call 630-293-1040 or visit their website at planterspalette.com.