



Perennials for Beginning Gardeners

Do you long for flower beds filled with lush, blooming perennials but don't know where to start? Are you a beginning gardener who is intimidated by all the choices at your local garden center?

There are many perennials perfect for beginning gardeners or for forming the foundation of a flower garden. The Planter's Palette has introduced a group of plants, called 'Reliable Performers,' that have been carefully chosen for their hardiness in northern Illinois gardens, their resistance to disease, their beautiful flowers or foliage; and the minimal amount of maintenance they require. You won't find new introductions in this list; only the best of the tried and true have earned a spot on the Reliable Performers team.

Here are a few of the 75 perennials designated as Reliable Performers.

Perennials for Sunny Sites

Achillea 'Coronation Gold' is a wonderful yarrow. The golden flowers are held on strong, 2-3'

long stems over dense clumps of gray-green, fern-like foliage. If Dark beds filled deadheaded, this yarrow will bloom from June through September. It is also drought and deer resistant.

Blue false indigo (*Baptisia australis*) blooms in May and June with striking indigo blue, pea-like flowers. Even when this plant is not flowering, it plays a valuable role in the garden. The blue-green foliage on this 3-4' shrub-like plant remains attractive all season long. Blue false indigo puts down deep roots and is drought resistant.



'Purple Smoke' is a cultivar of *Baptisia australis*.

robust plant growing 4-5' tall. Dark mauve flowers appear in August and September at a time when the garden is longing for color. Joe Pye weed prefers moist soil, but is adaptable to many growing conditions.

Geranium 'Rozanne' is the 2008 Perennial Plant Association's Perennial of the Year for good reason. Growing 18-20" tall and spreading 2-3' wide, it blooms with violet-blue flowers from June until we get a hard frost in fall. Its foliage extends its impact even longer with its burgundy fall color.



Geranium 'Rozanne'

Red pasque flower (*Pulsatilla vulgaris* 'Rubra') prefers a well-drained site. Fuzzy fern-like leaves emerge in late winter; reddish-violet flowers bloom in mid-April to early May; and soon after flowering, a feathering seed head appears.

Autumn Joy Sedum has been a popular choice for fall color for many years. It blooms from August to October with flowers in August and September. This hosta has thick, slug heads that begin pink and then turn russet in late fall. This plant forms an attractive mound of fleshy leaves and stems 18-24" tall and wide.

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Perennials for a Shady Site

Alchemilla mollis, commonly called Lady's Mantle, has sprays of small, chartreuse flowers in early to mid summer. The flowers are held above velvety gray-green foliage that holds glistening raindrops after a soft rain. Lady's Mantle is an excellent choice for edging the front of a shady border.



Alchemilla mollis

Queen of the Prairie (Filipendula rubra 'Venusta Magnifica ') sports fluffy heads of tiny pink flowers atop tall, sturdy stems. Perfectly suited for the back of the border, Queen of the Prairie grows about 6' tall. If you want color year-round in the garden, choose Obsidian coral bells (Heuchera). Its sultry, deep purple, scalloped leaves create drama in the garden with foliage instead of flowers. The foliage even keeps its color throughout the winter!

Start with these or any other perennials on the Reliable Performers team and you'll have a garden full of dependable, easy-care plants that perform like stars without making the demands of a prima donna. All they ask is that you amend your soil with organic matter when you plant them and provide at least 1" of water each week their first season to help them establish.

For a complete list of Reliable Performers, stop by The Planter's Palette or call 630-293-1040 x 2.

Most hostas are carefree. Their foliage may be green, blue, gray or variegated. They are available in a wide range of sizes – from a