

Perennials for Late Season Color

At a time when most perennials are winding down for the season, some are still blooming strong. If your garden is looking a little bit past its prime, try adding one or two of these late-blooming beauties to bring it back to life.



Daisy-like Asters add a bright splash of reliable color to the late summer and fall garden, blooming in shades of pink, purple, lavender and white, with contrasting yellow centers. Combine them with fall-blooming grasses for a pretty contrast in color and texture. Asters make good cut flowers, too, and are a colorful addition to fall arrangements. Most Asters prefer a sunny spot with adequate moisture.

Similar in appearance to Asters, Boltonia (False Chamomile) is another terrific addition for late season color. These sturdy plants can grow tall, up to six feet in some cases, and are perfect for the back of the border. Flowers are borne profusely from late summer until mid autumn, in shades of white, pink or lavender. Native to the central U.S., they are resistant to most insects and diseases. Like Asters, they prefer full sun in moist, well-drained soil. Some varieties may need staking, especially if grown in very rich soil or lower light situations.

Ceratostigma (leadwort) is a low-growing plant that makes a great groundcover or a good filler to weave between other plants. Slow to emerge in the spring, it quickly makes up for lost time to cover the ground with attractive, shiny green foliage by early summer. In August through October it is at its peak, covered with true blue flowers. As an added bonus, as the weather cools the foliage takes on deep red tones, a striking contrast to the brilliant blue flowers. This beautiful plant is drought tolerant and easy to grow. It prefers good drainage and full sun, but will tolerate light shade. Plant it in the spring for the best winter hardiness.

Almost every gardener knows Sedum Autumn Joy. Its showy, deep pink flower heads and long bloom time make it a classic, easy-care, reliable choice for long-lasting color in the fall border. Autumn Charm is another late-blooming Sedum, a variegated variety with flowers that change from white to pink to red as the season progresses. October stonecrop (Sedum sieboldii) is good for the front of the border as it grows only 6-8 inches tall. It has grayish-green foliage and dusty pink flowers. All types of Sedum are drought resistant. They prefer full sun but are tolerant of light shade, too. Just be sure to provide good drainage.

For a bold touch of color and texture, plant some late-blooming Aconitum (monkshood). These impressive perennials look similar to Delphiniums, with gorgeous spires of hooded flowers in shades of blue and violet over deep green foliage. They are good plants for the mixed border and also make good cut flowers. Be aware, however, that these plants are

poisonous if they are eaten. Taller varieties can reach heights of up to six feet and may need to be staked. Aconitum prefers a lightly shaded location with moist, organic soil.

Chelone (turtlehead) is another excellent choice for lightly shaded situations. The tubular, bearded flowers of these pretty perennials resemble snapdragons, in shades of pink, purple or white. They begin to flower in late summer and continue on into October. Growing about 2 to 3 feet tall, they have a sturdy, upright habit and they are attractive to hummingbirds. For best results, grow them in moist, organic soil in partial shade.

Those looking for a showy, almost shrub-like effect may want to try some fall-blooming Anemones. From late summer to fall, these perennials sport pretty 2 to 3 inch blooms on graceful tall stems, in shades of pink, rose or white. Foliage is dark green and attractive. These plants do best in moist, well-drained soil, in an area with morning sun and filtered afternoon shade, and they will spread if conditions are to their liking. Mulch them for the best winter survival.



Cimicifuga (snakeroot) is another fine choice for partial shade. It features long, bottlebrush flowers in shades of pink or white, over attractive, divided foliage in green to almost black. This plant can grow up to 7 feet tall; give it lots of space at the back of the border. Plant Cimicifuga in a moist situation in part shade, and amend the soil with plenty of organic matter.

Maureen Safarik is a horticulturist associated with The Planter's Palette, 28W571 Roosevelt Rd., Winfield, IL 60190. Call 630-293-1040 or visit their website at www.planterpalette.com.