

PERENNIALS THAT BLOOM THEIR HEARTS OUT

While most perennials flower for two or three weeks out of the year, some bloom much longer. Pump up the color in your garden with these long-blooming plants.

Start the season off right with some beautiful hellebores. Also known as Lenten or Christmas Roses, these harbingers of spring begin flowering in March and continue on through April or even May. Their flowers are cup-shaped and pendant, two to three inches across, in shades of white, purple, pink, yellow and green. The dark green, leathery foliage is attractive and semi-evergreen, and continues to look good throughout the growing season and most of the year. Plant these beauties close to the house or a walkway so they can be enjoyed even in the still cold weather of late winter. They prefer a position in light to part shade in moist, fertile, humus-rich soil, but they are not difficult to care for, requiring only a light spring trimming of any foliage that becomes tattered over the winter.

Candytuft is another pretty spring bloomer, with rounded clusters of pure white flowers covering the narrow, dark green foliage, starting in mid to late April and continuing through May, when the flowers are flushed with a soft lilac-pink. This low-growing plant is perfect for rock gardens or wall plantings. It prefers full sun and well-drained soil, but requires little care other than a cleanup of its evergreen foliage to remove winter damage, and a shearing back after it is finished flowering.

For an extra long flowering season, Corydalis is hard to beat. This diminutive, delicate looking plant blooms from May until October, peaking in the spring. Its tubular, spurred flowers are usually yellow, borne over mounding, fern-like green foliage. A stunning new variety, Berry Exciting, features purple flowers over bright gold foliage, and is sure to light up the garden. Grow Corydalis in a shady spot with good drainage. If this plant is happy, it will likely self-seed and multiply, but seedlings are not difficult to remove should they locate themselves where they are unwanted.



Blooming from June to August, Jupiters Beard (Centranthus) is an old-fashioned perennial that deserves a place in modern gardens. Its fragrant, star-like flowers are reddish pink or white, in rounded, 3-inch clusters over mounding foliage. Pretty in the garden, the flowers are also good for cutting. Grow this plant in the sunny border in average garden soil. Although it can be short-lived, it tends to self-seed, so once planted it will usually remain in the garden for many seasons to come.

No list of long-blooming perennials is complete without the mention of purple coneflowers (Echinacea), which bloom reliably from July through September. These classic prairie plants typically have pinkish-purple, daisy-like flowers with cone-shaped centers and drooping petals, on two to three foot plants. This genus has been the recipient of much attention from plant breeders, though, and purple coneflowers are now available

many other colors besides pink. Look for white, yellow, orange, green and red shades, and flowers that are single, double, drooping or non-drooping. Many are fragrant too. All varieties attract bees and butterflies, and the seed heads are favorites of goldfinches. Coneflowers look pretty when massed, and also combine well with other perennials and with grasses. They prefer a sunny spot, but light shade during the hottest part of the day will intensify their flower color.

Rudbeckia (Black-eyed Susan) is another popular coneflower with impressive flower power: most varieties bloom from June or July until September. The bright yellow, daisy-like flowers with contrasting centers are held on strong stems, and are like sunshine in the garden or in arrangements. Goldsturm is probably the most frequently planted variety, but there are many others, ranging in height from a compact 18 inches up to a towering 6 or 7 feet. Give these plants a well-drained spot in sun to light shade.

For guaranteed impact, pair any of the cone-flowers with some Russian sage. Its impressive violet-blue spires, shrub-like habit and silvery stems are a stunning contrast in color and form. Russian Sage prefers a sunny exposure and well-drained soil. Trim the stems back to about 6 inches tall in spring.

Plant some yarrow in a sunny, dry spot, and, if it is deadheaded, it will reward you with pretty, flat-topped clusters of flowers from June through September. This workhorse of the summer border comes in shades of yellow, red, lilac, pink and white, and is an excellent choice for cutting and for drying. Foliage is finely divided, green or silver-colored. Do not over-fertilize these plants. They prefer a lean soil.

Knautia is not as well known as some other perennials, but it is an excellent choice for the cottage or more casual garden. It sports its long-lasting, deep, purple-red, globe-shaped flower heads on slender stems from mid summer all the way until frost. Foliage stays low and grows in clumps. Grow Knautia in a sunny spot in moderately fertile, well-drained garden soil.

Add some (or all) of these reliable perennials to your garden for a bright, colorful, rewarding growing season.

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