



Small Wonders: Plants under 12" Tall

As with gifts, sometimes the best perennials come in small packages – those that stay under 12 inches tall. They are perfect for today's smaller gardens. And they are the only choice if you are like me - running out of room for super-sized varieties. Here are some of my favorite pint-sized perennials.

Small Perennials for Sun

Commonly called corkscrew onion or curly chives, *Allium senescens* 'Glaucum' explodes in late summer with lilac pink flower clusters. The rest of the season, the unique flat and twisted blue-green foliage provides long lasting interest. Use corkscrew onion as an edging plant or put it in a sunny rock garden where it will bloom later than most other rock garden plants



Allium senescens 'Glaucum'

Sea thrift (*Armeria maritima*)

forms a dense mound of grass-like, evergreen foliage. Tiny round flowers sit on stems well above the foliage in late May and into June. Alba has white flowers; Laucheana blooms in deep pink. Also with pink flowers, Nifty Thrifty blooms over cream and green variegated foliage, and Rubrifolia features reddish-purple foliage.

There are many bellflowers perfect for filling small nooks and crannies in the landscape. Pearl Deep Blue and Pearl White are members of the Carpathian bellflower (*Campanula carpatica*) family. Their irresistible bell-shaped flowers shine from June to August over neat tufts of bright green foliage.

Serbian bellflowers (*C. poscharskyana*) are gorgeous falling over a rock wall. Sky blue, star-shaped flowers appear in June and July over ground-hugging foliage. Blue Waterfall is a bit larger reaching 8 to 10 inches tall with darker blue flowers. Pair either of these tiny treasures with Lamb's Ear (*Stachys byzantia* 'Helene Von Stein').

Pure white daisy-like flowers

cover the silvery gray foliage of Snow-in-Summer (*Cerastium tomentosum*) from May into June. Make sure to plant this one in well-drained soil, especially in winter.

Blue Cushion Lavender is the baby of the *Lavandula angustifolia* family. Plant this cutie in a high and dry spot in the garden, and you'll be rewarded with fragrant, baby blue flowers from June to September. The silvery-gray foliage smells good, too.

The brightly colored flowers of Creeping Phlox (*Phlox subulata*) announce spring just as loudly as tulips and daffodils. The evergreen, mat-like foliage is blanketed with blooms in April and May. Blue Emerald has lavender blue flowers; pink blooms embellish Emerald Pink; and White Delight features large, pure white flowers.

Salvia nemorosa 'Marcus' shows off in June and July when his dark purple flower spikes rise from a small mound of neat green foliage. Partner this with butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) and the butterfly weed's bright orange blooms will sizzle.

Sedums are indispensable. **Small Perennials for Shade**
 These plants, with fleshy stems and leaves and fall-blooming flowers, are drought resistant and require very little care. Bertram Anderson boasts purple overlaid with dusty blue. Angelina shows off her brilliant golden yellow needle-like foliage all season long. The rounded gray-green foliage of October Stonecrop (*Sedum sieboldii*) is the perfect backdrop for its dusty pink flowers in September and October.

Stoke's Asters (*Stokesia laevis*) also offer a miniature member. Purple Pixie and White Star possess large flowers on small plants from July to September. Plant these in a protected spot or give them some extra winter protection.

Speedwells (*Veronica spp.*) are another family of plants that gives us plenty of small, but mighty perennials. Blooming from June to August with dense spikes of tiny flowers they don't make many demands of their gardeners – just site them in well-drained fertile soil. Bergan Blue sports clear pink flowers; Giles van Hees has flowers of Aztec Gold bloom over golden foliage.

Dwarf Lady's Mantle is a pint-sized version of *Alchemilla mollis*. The diminutive leaves covered with soft down hold sparkling raindrops and tiny, lime green flowers appear in May and June. Dainty and uniquely beautiful, Something Magic Cyclamen has heart shaped, silver edged, dark green leaves and is topped by large rose-pink flowers in April. Plant with spring bulbs in well-drained soil and over time they will spread into lovely colonies.

Sedges (*Carex spp.*) are invaluable for adding texture and form to the shade garden. Ice Dance has dark green leaves edged in white. The foliage of Bowles Golden is bright golden yellow. Blue Sedge displays leaves of steel blue.

It is hard to keep up with all the new varieties of Coral Bells (*Heuchera spp.*), but I say the more, the merrier. Especially when we now have some I can't be without, like Amethyst Mist with dark purple foliage misted in amethyst or Can Can with metallic silver foliage ruffled heavily enough to reveal the deep burgundy underneath. Or

Lime Rickey with frosted, lime-green foliage. Or Midnight Rose with near black leaves spattered with hot pink. Or Obsidian with near black, shiny leaves.

Unfortunately called lungwort, members of the *Pulmonaria* family grow well beneath trees and shrubs and bloom in April and May over white mottled foliage. Bertram Anderson blooms in violet blue. The flowers of Majesty open blue and then fade to pink.



Plant Foamflowers (*Tiarella cordifolia*) in moist soil high in organic matter and they will reward you with fabulous foliage and spikes of white or pink flowers in May. Crow Feather possesses deeply cut, bright green leaves with black centers that turn pink, reddish purple and black in fall. Iron Butterfly has gracefully cut foliage marked in maroon.

And then there are all the small hostas...ah, the hostas!