



Some Perennials Need Time

Just like candy bars tempt you when you are standing in line at the grocery store, plants with beautiful blooms and lush foliage have a way of ending up in your cart when you're shopping at your local garden center.

But what about those plants that need their roots in the soil and a little time to put on a good show? You might pass by these plants sitting on the benches, only to discover them later in a friend's garden looking fabulous.

Or, maybe you are the gardener who continues to move a plant from place to place in hope that eventually you will find just the right place where it will thrive. Just like children, some plants need a little time to show their potential, some time to settle in before they are willing to reward you with their bloom.

It's time you were introduced to a few plants that may begin life in a pot as an 'ugly duckling' but, with a little patience and a trick or two, can become stunning 'swans' in your landscape.

Fleeceflower (Persicaria) – A pot is not big enough to display the enthusiasm for the growth of Persicaria. Persicaria polymorpha makes a great background plant in a garden with its 5' creamy white plumes and large, pointed leaves.

A close relative, mountain fleeceflower, looks very different. It is shorter in stature and bears many long crimson flower spikes that arch from pretty chevron shaped leaves. The leaves wrap around or clasp each stem giving this plant its unique character.

Both of these plants are very robust growers and need to be seen in the ground to be appreciated. They are both clump formers that lack the wandering habits of some of their other family members.

Gas Plant (Dictamnus) – This plant may be the winner of the 'ugly duckling' award often requiring two years or more before it realizes its potential. With each succeeding year the floral display increases in magnificence. Your patience will be aptly rewarded because this long-lived beauty will flourish in your garden for many years.

One caution: wear gloves when working with gas plant. It contains oils that can cause skin irritation in some people.



Bluestar (Amsonia) – There are two types that are valuable additions to the garden – Willow Amsonia and Arkansas Amsonia. These both have blue star-shaped flowers in spring, foliage that turns a blaze of yellow in fall, and a shrub-like presence in the garden all season long. Both need to be seen in a garden setting to be appreciated.

Tree Peony (*Paeonia suffruticosa*) – The queen of a perennial border, a tree peony boasts large, sumptuous blooms of brilliant color. They mature into 3 to 5’ shrubs with exfoliating bark and handsome foliage. All they require is good garden soil, patience, and a spot in morning sun with a little protection from the hot afternoon sun. One of the smartest things I ever did was plant a couple tree peonies in my gardens. I pat myself on the back when I enjoy their blooms every spring.



Joe Pye Weed (*Eupatorium maculatum*) – One of the architectural building blocks of the English garden and on my top ten all-time favorite perennials, Joe Pye Weed is unfortunately ignored in many American gardens. It is a wonderful background plant in perennial borders with equally robust companions like ornamental grasses or tall rudbeckias. Its stems and leaves are tinged with purple.

If you only add one new plant to your garden this year, let it be Joe Pye Weed. If its size scares you, try Little Joe. It is the baby of the family only growing 3 to 4’ tall.

Hellebore (*Helleborus*) – Amongst the longest blooming perennials that are available for our shade gardens are the shade-loving Hellebores. The flowers may begin their show in late winter or very early spring and persist through late spring and remain attractive as they dry on the plant prolonging the show.

Selections for a particular flower color are now available as well as a wider variety of types, all with distinguishing features. Hellebores grow well in soil that has been generously amended with compost or other organic matter.

Goatsbeard (*Aruncus*) – Reliable and long-lived, goatsbeard is also known for its adaptability. It sports creamy-white plumes of tiny white flowers above light green, fern-like foliage in late spring. There are varieties of goatsbeard from a demure 18” tall to an imposing 4’ in height. Both will perform their best in filtered light and moist soil.

Yellow Wax Bells (*Kirengeshoma*) – I must admit this plant has a weak, almost spindly appearance as it sits in its pot on the garden center bench. If you could only picture its unique yellow flowers dangling like bells from stems amongst the maple-shaped leaves on this perennial with a rounded shrub-like presence, you would never pass it by.

Good garden soil amended with lots of organic matter, and of course, patience is needed. Yellow wax bells do not like to be moved so plant them where they can stay.

It’s fine to fall in love at first sight with all the blooming beauties at the garden center, but give some of those late bloomers a chance too. You will be rewarded with stunning specimens in your landscape.



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