

The Pleasures of Perennials

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Now, after many years of gardening in the same place, I am reaping the benefits of all the hard work invested in prior years. The perennial garden, once established is beautiful, resilient, low maintenance, and gives pleasure year-after-year.

Perennials are basically of two types. Those that have an obvious year-round presence in the garden whether evergreen or deciduous, and those that die back and disappear in the cold, short days of winter only to emerge with new growth in spring. These can be natives, herbs, trees, flowers, ground covers, or shrubs. They create a beautiful and diverse tapestry with little work and provide variety of size, color, texture and fragrance to your garden. Not exactly perennials, but contributing to the low work garden, are annual plants that self propagate by seed season after season.

Starting with ground covers we have many beautiful perennials. Sedum ground covers are lush, colorful, low maintenance, low water, spreading, flowering, and provide a living mat year around. Creeping Thymes are also a good choice, and both of these plants mix well and fill in the spaces in a rock garden, and are perfect for our environment and soils.

In wetter, shadier zones in your garden you can plant creepers like Mints, Vinca, Ajuga, and Oregano for example, but these can become invasive if not controlled. In dry, more neglected areas native grasses are a good choice, like Blue Grama, or Buffalo grass. They can naturalize with little water, are low maintenance and mix well with natives.

Bulbs and tubers are the surprises packages of the perennial garden. Besides the colorful heralds of early spring – Crocus, Narcissus, Tulips, Daffodils, Hyacinth – the vigorous Irises and Day Lilies are mainstays of the Sedona garden. They have low water demands and can adapt well to any soil. They are attractive in clusters under trees and amongst shrubs, and they can also create a mass unto themselves.

In the bulb category one mustn't forget the alliums including onions and garlic. Often thought of as annuals, onions and garlic have lovely flowers and can naturalize by seeds and bulbs. Some varieties look beautiful in bunches such as chives and garlic chives. They can also act as a natural insect repellent when planted as companions with other plants.

All herbaceous plants like Lavender, Sage family (salvia), Artemisias, Thymes, Rosemary, Rue, Santolina, and other native shrubs and ornamentals such as roses of all kinds, Heavenly bamboo, Texas Ranger sages, Mahonia, Butterfly Bush, Lilacs, Jasmynes and Spirea contribute color of foliage and seasonal flowers. We are indeed fortunate to live in a climate that is hospitable to a wide range of perennial shrubs. The key is to meet their soil, water and exposure requirements.

When it comes to summer color perennial flowers can be complemented with self-seeding annuals like wildflowers such as Poppies, Flax, Bluebells, Coneflower, Mexican Hat, Delphinium, Lupines and so forth, One can sow a southwest wildflower mix of annuals and perennials, and under the right conditions they will naturalize and re-seed in subsequent years.

Some of the hardy perennials flowers in our area include: Coreopsis, Columbine, Dianthus, Candy Tufts, Bee Balm, Shasta Daisy, Echinacea, Penstamon, Asters, Blanket Flower, Hollyhocks, native Globe Mallows and Verbena just to name a few.

In our high desert you can create a cactus garden along with yuccas and other low water use plants, you can mix cacti amongst natives, and you can include them as specimen plants amongst other non-natives. Cacti add much interest to the perennial garden by adding color, texture, flowers and even fruit.

Native trees, ornamental trees and fruit trees contribute much to the perennial garden. One factor is shading. All trees can provide a cooling canopy for an understory of flowers, herbs, vegetables or other shrubs, offering needed protection from scorching sun.

The perennial garden, once established, has the added benefits of attracting birds, butterflies, bees and a host of pollinators; it becomes a year-around habitat and attracts lizards and other wildlife; it is low maintenance, it assists in weed suppression without chemicals, and can conserve water, reduce labor and increase soil health.

Gardens for Humanity has monthly workshops to help with gardening in our unique environment. For more information and to learn more about our programs visit our website www.gardensforhumanity.org.