Perennials in the Landscape

Home gardeners and commercial landscapers alike are becoming more aware of the rich potential hardy herbaceous perennials have to offer. Perennials just may be the most overlooked group of landscaping plants in our area, and for no good reason. They offer a certain permanency to the landscape, and are virtually unequaled in providing abundant color and interest in return for the care they require.

Botanically, perennials are plants which live for more than two years. This, of course, would include trees, turf grasses and shrubs. Horticulturally, though, the term perennial refers to a group of herbaceous (nonwoody) plants most frequently grown for their colorful flowers. Plants possessing bulbs and bulblike structures (corms, tubers, etc.) technically belong to this group, and are often included with them. More frequently they are separated off into their own category, though the dividing line is often blurred.

Perennials have probably been under utilized in the South because of a general assumption that they don't do well here. Many perennials, however, thrive under our growing conditions. Just make sure you exercise care in choosing varieties suitably adapted to your situation.

Most perennials are completely winter-hardy in the Southeast, although there are a number of tender perennials grown in the Gulf Coastal areas which would not be suitable in areas with colder winters. Conversely, some perennials like peonies do better where winters are colder. Overall, the major limiting factors for tolerance and susceptibility to diseases favored by heat and humidity. When selecting perennials, you should tend toward those with a reputation for heat tolerance.

In addition to climatic adaptation, perennials should be selected according to the conditions of the site. Some perennials are tolerant of poor drainage, but most require excellent drainage. Light preference varies from shade loving to those that require full sun.

Height, spread, color, plant habit and time and length of bloom should be given careful consideration. In most cases, many varieties of a given species are available that greatly extend the size and color range of a species. Commercial catalogs are a good source of information on varieties. It is best, if possible, to purchase plants by botanical name and variety, as common names can vary from region to region.

One of the most important factors in success with perennials is careful bed preparation. Remember that unlike beds of annuals which are replanted two to three times a year, perennials live for years, and chances to rework the beds occur much less frequently. Extra effort at the beginning will pay in the long run.

Beds should be deeply dug to a depth of at least 8-10 inches. Many perennials are deep rooted. Some perennials grow well in sandy soils, but most prefer soils rich in organic matter. Heavy clay soils should be amended with sand, perlite or fine bark to improve drainage. Sandy
soil can be improved by the addition of compost, peat moss or aged manure. In some cases raised beds or even underground drainage lines may be necessary.

You will definitely want to have your soil tested. Most perennials will do well between a pH of 5.5-7.0. Fertilizer and lime should be applied according to soil test results and thoroughly incorporated. This is most conveniently done at the same time soil amendments are added. Finally, rake the area smooth to remove rocks, roots and other debris.

Weed control should be considered from the very beginning. If the bed is full of weeds or covered by turf, kill off existing unwanted vegetation with glyphosate (Roundup) prior to soil preparation. Once the bed is prepared, consider applying a soil fumigant prior to planting to eliminate problems with nematodes, weed seeds, and soil-borne insects and diseases. Read and follow the label directions carefully to avoid damage to nearby trees and shrubs.

Planting is best done in the fall here in the South, because it gives the plant more time to establish a strong root prior to active growth in the spring. Early spring planting is also satisfactory. Perennials are sold in containers or bare root. Container grown plants generally make transplanting and establishment more reliable.

Most perennials are planted so that the crown is at or slightly above the soil surface. Planting depth is extremely important and should be watched carefully. Planting too deep can lead to crown rot and planting too high can allow the roots to dry and prevent proper establishment. After planting, water the bed thoroughly. Carefully label the planting so that the types and positions of the perennials are not forgotten.

Perennials are tough. Unlike annuals which give up after one season, perennials have the stamina to live for years. A well-planned perennial bed planted with carefully chosen, well adapted plants has the ability to provide color and interest season after season, year after year without constant replanting. But this doesn't mean that perennials can withstand neglect.

The drought tolerance of perennials varies, but all require an ample moisture supply during active growth. Do not rely on normal rainfall. Irrigate deeply when necessary. Do not rely on normal rainfall. Irrigate deeply when necessary. Whenever possible, avoid overhead irrigation. You'll lessen the chance of disease invasion and reduce damage to flowers. Soaker hoses and drip irrigation systems are excellent for perennials.

Apply mulches around perennial plants. Mulching helps conserve moisture and control weeds as well as improving the overall appearance of the bed. Mulches also prevent soil crusting, splashing and compaction, improve water penetration and help regulate soil temperature.

Fertilization should be continued through the growing season. Fertilization practices should be based on soil test results. Applications should be made in early spring and again once or twice during the summer. Follow all fertilizations with a thorough watering.

Maintenance weed control should be done by hand or with the use of herbicides, as deep cultivation around the plants is liable to damage their roots. Exercise extreme caution in the use of herbicides. Read the label carefully and be sure it will not injure desirable plants.
To maintain vigorous growth on long blooming perennials, remove the mature flowers. Not allowing seeds to form will often stimulate growth of side shoots on which additional flowers will form. To keep plants looking neat, also remove dead or unattractive foliage and stems. Cut back dead top growth in fall. Remember that it is natural for the tops of many perennials to die down over the winter, although a few herbaceous perennials are evergreen.

Most perennials eventually become overcrowded and require division. Mature clumps can be cut or pulled apart. Divisions should usually contain three to five shoots or growing points. Discard any weak or diseased divisions. The time to divide perennials is most often fall or early spring. Many perennials are easily propagated this way. Perennials are also propagated by stem cuttings, root cuttings and seed.

As for all plants in the landscape, perennials have their share of insect and disease problems. Control measures may sometimes be required. Generally, proper site selection, good cultural practices and careful selection of well adapted varieties will prevent many problems. For identification and recommended control of specific insect and disease pest, consult your local county Extension agent.

**Prepared by:**
Dan Gill
LSU AgCenter
Consumer Horticulturist
The following is a list of perennials. Those rated (1) Excellent and (2) Good are generally satisfactory for most areas of southeast Louisiana. There are, of course, significant climatic differences in our area, and this should be taken into account. Perennials rated (3) have not performed as reliably. Perennials with a (4) Poor rating have typically performed poorly in For information on specific perennials best suited to your particular area, contact your local Cooperative Extension Service. Ratings: (1) Excellent; (2) Good; (3) Fair; (4) Poor

(3) Acanthus. *Acanthus mollis* (Bear's Breeches); (3) *Acanthus montanus*

Achillea. (1) *Achillea Millefolium* (Common yarrow), (3) *A. Filipendulina* (Fern-leaf yarrow), (3) *A. ptarmica*, (2) *A. taygetea*

(2) Ajuga. *Ajuga reptans* (Bugleflower)

(1) *Allium tuberosum*

(1) *Alpinia zerumbet*

(4) Alyssum. *Aurinia saxatilis* (Gold allysum)

(1) *Alsonia. Alsonia tabernaemontana* (Blue Star)

(4) Anthemis. *Anthemis tinctoria* (Golden Marguerite)

(4) Aquilegia *A. species Aquilegia x hybrida*, (1) Hinckley’s columbine (*A. chrysantha var. hinckleyana*)

Artemisia. (4) *Artemisia Stellerana* (Wormwood) (1). *A. ludoviciana, A. absinthium, A. Schmidtiana*

Asclepias. (3) *Asclepias tuberosa* (Butterfly weed, Chigger weed) (1) *A. curassavica*

(2) Aster. *Aster species and hybrids, Aster nova-anglai*

(4) Astilbe. *Astilbe japonica* and hybrids (False spirea)

(2) Begonia. *Begonia grandis* (Hardy begonia)

(3) Bergenia. *Bergenia cordifolia* (Heartleaf Bergenia)

(1) *Bletilla striata*

(2) *Boltonia asteroides*

(1) *Brugmansia. (2) Brugmansia arborea, Brugmansia x insignis*

(1) *Callirhoe involucrata*

(3) Campanula. *Campanula rotundifolium, Campanula trachelium*

(2) Candytuft. *Iberis sempervirens*

(2) Cardinal Flower. *Lobelia cardinalis*

(4) Carnation. *Dianthus, Caryophyllus* (Hardy garden carnation)

(4) Centaurea. *Centaurea montana* (Perennial bachelor’s button)

(1) Cestrum. *Cestrum diurnum, Cestrum elegans, Cestrum nocturnum*

(2) Chinese lantern. *Physalis Alkekengi*

(1) Spider Plant. *Chlophytum vitaum*

(1) *Chrysanthemum. Chrysanthemum x mortifolium* (Garden mum), (4) *C. coccinum, C. coccinum*

(1) *Chrysanthemum x supurbum*

(1) *Clerodendrum nutans, C. ugandense, C. speciosum*

(3) Columbine.

(1) Coreopsis. *Coreopsis grandiflora, C. lanceolata, C. verticillata* (Threadleaf coreopsis), (3) *C. auriculata*

(1) *Costus igneus*

(1) *Crinum litifolium*

(1) *Crocosmia pottsii*

(1) *Cuphea hyssopifolia, Cuphea ignea, Cuphea micropetala*

(4) Dianthus. *Dianthus plumarius* (Pinks)

(4) *Dicentra. Dicentra spectablili* (Bleeding-heart)
Doronicum cordatum
Echincacea purpurea
Eupatorium. Eupatorium sp., Eupatorium coelestinum
Foxglove. Digitalis purpurea and hybrids
Gaillardia. Gaillardia x grandiflora (Blanket flower)
Gaura lindheimeri
Gerbera daisy. Gerbera Jamesonii
Globba schlumburgii, Globba winitti
Gypsophila. Gypsophila paniculata (Baby’s breath)
Hedychium coccineum, (1) Hedychium coronarium, (1) Hedychium gardneranum
Swamp Sunflower Helianthus angustifolia
Heliopsis. Heliopsis helianthoides subsp. scabra
Helleborus. Helleborus niger (Christmas rose), H. orientalis (Lenten rose)
Hemerocallis. Hemerocallis species and hybrids (Daylily)
Heuchera. Heuchera sanguinea (Coralbells)
Hibiscus. Hibiscus moscheutos (Rose mallow), (1) Hibiscus coccineus, (1) Hibiscus moscheutos hybrids, (1) Hibiscus mutabilis
Hollyhock. Alcea rosea
Hosta. Hosta species and varieties (Plantain lily)
Houttuynia cordata ‘Variegata’
Hypostes
Iris. (3) Iris hybrids (Bearded iris), (1) I. sibirica (Siberian iris), (4) I. kaempferi (Japanese iris) (1) Louisiana Iris and (1) I. pseudacorus (Yellow Flag), (3) Iris x germanica
Justicia. (1) Justicia aurea, (1) Justicia carnea, (2) Justicia carthaginensis, (2) Justicia spicigera
Kniphofia uvaria
Lantana. Lantana camara, (1) Lantana montevidensis
Lavandula cultivars
Ligularia, (Ligularia tussilaginea)
Leonotis leonurus, Lion’s tail
Liatris. Liatris scariosa (Tall gayfeather), L. pycnostachya (Kansas gay-feather), L. spicac
Linum. Linum perenne (Flax)
Lirioppe. Lirioppe muscari (Bordergrass), L. spicata (Creeping lilyturf)
Lobelia cardinalis
Lysimachia nummularia Lysimachia punctata
Lythrum. Lythrum salicara (Purple loosestrife)
Mesembrenthemum crystallinum
Monarda. Monarda didyma (Bee balm, bergamot)
Musa velutina
Neomarica gracilis, Neomarica longifolia
Odontonema strictum
Oenothera. (3) Oenothera missourensis (Evening Primrose) (1) O. speciosa
Ophiopogon. Ophiopogon japonicus (Mondo grass), O. jaburan (Snakebeard)
Pachysandra. Pachysandra terminalis (Japanese pachysandra)
Papaver orientale
Patrinia scabiosifolia
Penstemon. *Penstemon* sp. (Beard Tongue)

1. *Perovskia atriplicifolia*
2. *Phlox paniculata* (Garden phlox, summer phlox) (3) *P. subulata* (Moss phlox, thrift) (1) *P. divaricata* (Blue phlox), *Phlox Carolina* ‘Miss Lingard’

1. *Physostegia virginiensis* (Obedient plants)
2. *Platycodon grandiflorus* (Balloon flower)
1. *Polygonum capitatum*

Purple coneflower. *Echinacea purpurea*

Rudbeckia. (2) *Rudbeckia hirta* (Black-eyed Susan), (1) *R. fulgida* ‘Goldsturm’

2. *Ruellia devosiana*, *Ruellia graecizans*, (1) *R. brittoniana*
2. *Russelia equisetiformis*

1. *Salvia*. *Salvia farinacea* (Blue salvia), (4) *S. x superba*, (2) *Salvia chiapensis*, (1) *Salvia coccinea*, (1) *Salvia discolor*, (1) *Salvia leptophylla*, (1) *Salvia madrenis*

4. *Santolina*. *Santolina chamaecyparissus* (Lavender cotton), *S. virens* (Green lavender cotton)

2. *Saponaria officinalis* var. *flore-pleno*

1. *Saxifraga stolonifera*

1. *Sedum*. *Sedum spectabile*, (1) *S. acre*, (1) *S. album*

1. Shasta daisy. *Chrysanthemum x superbum*

2. *Solidago hybrids*

1. *Spiderwort*. *Tradescantia virginiana*

3. *Stachys*. *Stachys lantana* (Lamb’s ears), *Stachys byzantina*

3. *Statice*. *Limonium latifolium*

1. *Stokesia*. *Stokesia cyannea* (Stokes aster), *Stokesia laevis*

4. *Sweet William*. *Dianthus barbatus*

4. *Sweet Woodruff*. *Asperula odorata*

1. *Symphytum officinale*

3. Thymes. *Thymus vulgaris* (Common thyme)

2. *Tibouchina urvilleana*

1. *Tradescantia x andersoniana*


1. *Tulbaghia violacea*

2. *Verbena rigida*, *Verbena teniusecta*

1. *Veronica*. *Veronica spicata* (Speedwell)

1. *Vernonia altissima*

1. *Vinca*. *Vinca major* (Periwinkle)

Viola. (4) *Viola cornuta* (Horned violet), (1) *V. odorata* (Sweet violet), (4) *V. tricolor* (Johnny-jump-up)

1. *Wedelia trilobata*

2. Wild Ginger. *Asarum europaeum*

1. *Xanthosoma atrovirens albomarginatum*

1. *Zingiber zerumbet darceyi*

Mention of a commercial business, product or pesticide trade name is done with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement is given by the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service.