



## Long Blooming Perennials

*Dear Master Gardener,*

*Most of my perennials are looking tired and worn out. Can you give me some pointers on adding some late-season color and life to my perennial beds?*

*--Kathy Cormany*

Jazzing up your garden for a late season show is easy with long-blooming perennials and late season stars. Intersperse these beauties with your early- and mid-season plants for a great show throughout the fall months.

First, add some perennials with longer bloom times. While most perennials bloom for about a month, several keep up their show for two or three months. Some even bloom right up until frost.

Threadleaf coreopsis has delicate foliage and yellow or pink daisies that bloom from midsummer to fall. Catmint delivers clouds of tiny blue flowers from mid-spring to fall above soft mounds of aromatic foliage. Salvia has spikes of tiny purple, rose or white flowers that appear from May to frost. And cranesbill showcases five-petaled flowers above fan-shaped foliage all summer long in shades ranging from creamy white to hot pink and lavender-blue.

Gaura is one of my all-time favorites, delivering tall wands of dainty blossoms from June to October in shades of pink and white. Its butterfly-like blooms move in the slightest breeze, giving motion and a delightful airy texture. The most common white cultivar is actually called "Whirling Butterflies."

The puffy flowers of *scabiosa* or pincushion flower do resemble Grandma's pincushions and dance on foot-high stems above fernlike foliage. Most varieties bloom in shades of pink or lavender-blue and keep going from May to frost.

Can you have a perennial garden without coneflowers? Yes, but I wouldn't recommend it. *Echinacea* comes in so many wonderful colors and forms and blooms from June to frost. Try a soft pink, hot pink, orange or white variety or new double ruffled pink "Razzle Dazzle." Then leave the stems and cones standing at the end of the season to feed the birds and add striking winter interest.

Ice plant (*Delosperma cooperi* or *ashtoni*) has become hugely popular due to its reputation for non-stop blooms and knockout hot pink flowers. Fleshy succulent leaves can be pointed or flat and fuzzy, adding interesting texture to your gardens.

All of the above plants like it hot and sunny. Shade gardeners can rejoice, however, in the availability of some long-blooming perennials for shadier spots. My favorite energetic perennial for shade is the reblooming bleeding heart, *Dicentra eximia*. This lovely lady looks like her cousin – the traditional bleeding heart – with pink heart-shaped blossoms and delicate foliage. But, unlike the ephemeral which disappears after a brief show in May, the reblooming varieties keep blooming right up until frost.

How do you make sure these perennials deliver their longest blooms? Make your mantra: deadhead, deadhead, deadhead. Keep cutting spent flowers off to ensure repeat blooms. And if the foliage starts to look nasty, cut it down by a third or more to stimulate a flush of new growth...and blooms.

After you've added some long-blooming perennials, consider some late-season stars for terrific fall color.

Daisy-like asters pop color and add a sweet softness. The golden sprays of goldenrod add a flash of yellow whether you choose a knee-high cultivar like "Golden Fleece" or dramatic four-foot "Fireworks." State law doesn't require that you add the state flower, black-eyed Susan, to your beds, but why wouldn't you? She is a golden beauty that demands attention with her 3-foot flower stalks and vigorous habit.

Fall-blooming sedums deserve a spotlight, too. Their fleshy leaves add great contrast throughout the gardening season while their rosy flowers add richness in the fall. Plus, bees and butterflies flock to fall-blooming sedum for its abundant nectar

Who doesn't love blue? Deep blue plumbago is a favorite border plant for its rich color, low habit and fiery red fall leaf color. For a softer blue, try Russian sage. *Perovskia* has aromatic silver foliage and pale blue flower spikes that add drama and a wonderful fragrance to the fall garden.

Fall perennial gardens can be spectacular. By showcasing long-blooming perennials and late season performers, you can have great color, texture and fragrance right up to the first nip of frost.

*Annette Ipsan, Master Gardener*

*For more information about horticulture or the Master Gardener Program in Frederick County, call the Frederick County Office of the Maryland Cooperative Extension, (301) 600-1596, or visit <http://www.frederick.umd.edu/>. Our mission is to educate Maryland residents about safe, effective and sustainable horticultural practices that build healthy gardens, landscapes and communities.*