News Release

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Perennials Deliver Beauty Year after Year

I love perennials. Trees and shrubs are wonderful, but nothing beats perennials’ razzle-dazzle color show and giving nature. Technically, perennials are plants that come back year after year. But they are so much more. With bloom times from February to frost, they deliver a kaleidoscope of colors and forms nearly year-round.

Today in my perennial garden, tiny dianthus sprout pink lollipops of bloom. Purple allium shake giant pom-poms. Columbine stars tremble in the breeze. Butterflies dine on a ruffle of pure white candytuft and bees hum in blue clouds of catmint. What’s not to love?

Then there is fragrance. Lilacs and roses get all the press, but perennials can smell just as sweet. Lavender, phlox and cheddar pinks are just a few fragrant perennials that make us close our eyes and inhale deeply to savor the scents of vanilla, cloves, baby powder or fine French perfume.

So, how do you get started in perennials? Pick a place and a color scheme. Look around your yard for a spot that could use some punch. Is it sunny or shady? Wet or dry? Know what your plants need to thrive.

What’s nearby? Is there a backdrop of evergreens or other plants? Does anything bloom that you might need to coordinate with? I like to start with three colors in new beds – such as pink/purple/white or yellow/orange/red – to keep it simple.

Now, go shopping. Head to your favorite garden center with the measurements of your new perennial bed, your plant requirements and a color scheme. Pick a few things you like in varied heights and gather the pots together. Do you like the look?

Have fun with foliage. Most perennials bloom for about a month, so it’s smart to pay attention to the leaves you’ll see all season. Leaves can be skinny or stout, waxy or wrinkled, fuzzy or fan-shaped, or a dozen shades of green, grey or red. Mix it up.
I like to have something blooming all the time, so I choose plants with flowering times from spring to frost. Then I add a punch of winter interest with a few plants with interesting seed heads like coneflowers or Brazilian verbena. Avoid onesies. Not the baby outfits, but the habit of buying only one of a particular plant. While one bold specimen can be an effective focal point, perennials often look best when planted in groups or curving sweeps. So, try three or five of a plant. Look for plants that are vigorous and whose roots fill the pot. Plant them in a hole that is the depth of the root ball and twice its width. Tease out the roots a bit to encourage new growth. Water deeply at planting and about once a week for a month.

Perennials keep giving. Divide them every two to three years in the spring or fall by digging up the whole plant and separating it into several sections, each with healthy roots and leaves. Share with friends or feed your newest addiction by expanding your own perennial beds.

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