

*Ten Perennials for
Your Borders and
Gardens*



Volume 1

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Primulas

Add Some Spring Color

The arrival of early primroses in the garden centers or peeking through the last snow is a sign that spring really has arrived. Even the name primula, derived from the Latin primus meaning "first", tells these are among the first flowers of spring.

Over 400 species of primroses exist, grouped according to flower types of Candelabras, Auriculas, Denticulatas and Polyanthus. Primulas are perennials, forming a rosette of leaves at ground level and flowers with five petals. They can grow in a wide variety of climates, but particularly thrive in the temperate moist climate of the West Coast. Grouped together in the garden or in a container at your entry, the masses of blooms adding a cheery spot of color in the gray days of early spring.



The most familiar primroses are the Polyanthus and Auriculas, with groups of blossoms rising just above the leafy rosette. Polyanthus can have red, purple, yellow and even blue blooms. This variety needs cooler temperatures and a moist soil. If you buy them, keep them in a cool spot indoors until the weather is warmer.

Auriculas are split into two categories – garden and show. All Auriculas can be recognized by their distinct circle of white at the center of the flowers, surrounded by petals in vivid yellows, reds, purples and blues. Show varieties may be striped or fancy, with hints of gray or green. Garden auriculas are hardy, but protect them from slugs, or you'll find the leaves disappearing!

Once you plant them outdoors, cover them at night if you expect a drop in temperature. On the West Coast, these primroses can be planted in the fall, can even offer a welcome spot of color throughout a milder winter. Established primroses will begin blooming as early as late February, depending on the location.

Denticulata primroses are easily identified because the flowers look like little drumsticks. The individual flowers are grouped to form a round ball that is held upright on a stiff stem well above the gray-green deciduous leaves. This variety flowers from March through April. It does best in dappled shade, with moist well-drained soil.



Candelabra primroses are the largest of the primula group. May blooming P. japonica is a Candelabra type, with blossoms purple-red through to pink and white. The blossoms are held on tall stems, and can reach 18 inches tall. An



interesting Candelabra type is P. pulverenta, which can grow up to 90 centimeters - that's 3 feet!

It has whitish waxy stems rising above the base rosette that support whorls of deep magenta flowers. It continues to add whorls from the top, growing taller with each ring of flowers. Many of the candelabra primroses are late spring to summer bloomers, thriving best in moist semi-shade.

Propagating Primulas

You can easily propagate primroses by taking a leaf from the mother plant. Tug it downward, and look for the small bud right where the leaf joined the stem. It's this little bud that will grow into a new plant. Dip the stem in some rooting hormone and put it into a pot with moist sterile medium. Cover it loosely with plastic to keep the humidity in, and set it on a cool windowsill away from direct sun. Within two weeks, you should see the new plant developing. Primroses can also be grown from seed, or propagated by division.

If you're looking for a splash of cheery bright color in early spring, then have a closer look at the Primula family.

Ornamental Alliums

Unique Flowers for Your Perennial Border

Alliums are one of the largest genera in the plant world, with more than 750 known species. Most common to many of us are the lowly onion and its close relative, garlic.

But wait – this huge group of plants also includes many attractive and striking perennials for the flower garden. If you grow chives in your herb garden, you will have some idea of the ornamental potential here.

Alliums are herbaceous perennials – the foliage dies down to the ground. In some cases this happens before flowering, in others, the foliage remains until frost. Some have broad flat leaf blades while others have leaf blades that are rounded with a hollow channel inside. The leaves sprout in spring from a bulb which can be single or clustered, as in garlic. Each clustered bulb can be separated to form a new plant.



Allium flowers are mainly held erect on the tip of a stem or scape, and form a rounded or ball shaped inflorescence or flower head. Others have star-like clusters of flowers, and a few have hanging pendants of blooms. Each plant will flower only once in a season, and the seed heads, if left on the plant, can add some fall attraction.

Alliums can be started from seed easily in spring, and transplanted into the ground when about six inches tall. As they grow, an underground bulb will form, and each year new foliage and flowers will rise from this bulb. Many alliums produce little bulblets or offsets around the parent one, and these can be removed and planted. This is the most common method of propagation. Others will form bulblets, known as bulbils, in the flowerhead.

Ornamental alliums come in a range of heights and colors for a sunny and not too moist spot in the garden. The following are some of the most commonly grown:

Caeruleum: This is known as the blue globe, developing a good sized dense ball of deep blue flowers. Give it full sun and average to dry well-drained soil and it will do well. In damp conditions, the bulbs may rot.

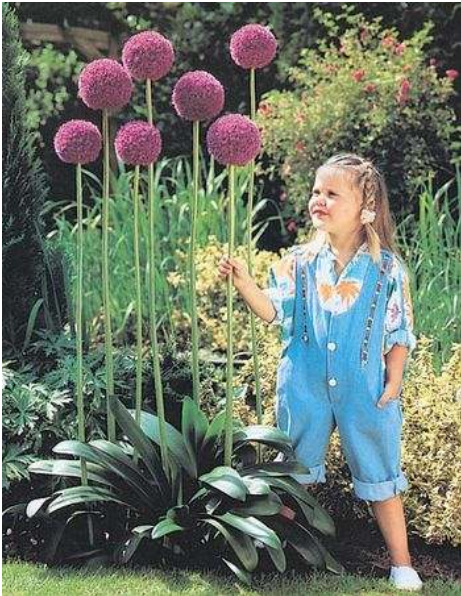
Cernuum: This is the charming and delicate 'nodding onion', with umbels of mauve to lilac flowers. It is a good rock garden or plant for the front of a border, growing up to 12 inches tall. This is a North American wildflower.



Schoenoprasum: This is a select form of chives, with extra large rosy-purple balls of flowers. Use it as a border or a herb garden plant, as the foliage can be used like common chives.

Senescens: This is the pink curly onion, with unique twisting leaves of a blue-green color rising spirally from the base. It has small clusters of pink flowers, and is suitable in borders or as edging.

Hollandicum: This sensational variety has rounded heads full of deep violet flowers. Growing to 40 inches in height, it is a perfect addition to a sunny perennial border.



Giganteum: This one, shown here, has very dramatic flower clusters that grow to 4 to 8 inches in diameter! The balls of lavender-purple blooms rise up to 48 inches above ground, making a bold statement. Plant them at the back of a border, where they will show above most other plants. These are striking in floral arrangements.

Schubertii: This hardy allium has one of the most unique and striking blossom heads. It looks like an exploding sparkler, with up to 200 individual florets thrusting outwards, so the whole airy umbel can reach 15 inches in diameter! The long-lasting flowers can be pink or purple, and are replaced by fluffy seedpods.

We have just touched on the ornamental alliums, and as you can see, they can make an unique addition of shape, size and color to your borders and rock gardens and cut bouquets.

Penstemons

Showy Garden Trumpets

The penstemon genus is a large one, with species indigenous to North America and Asia. The name Penstemon comes from the Latin pente for 5 and stemon for stamens, since the tube-shaped flowers have 5 stamens, 4 fertile and one infertile. Many of the native penstemons thrive in areas with warm arid summers. They thrive on rocky Alpine slopes, in deserts and even in moist forests, providing the drainage is good.



Commonly known as 'beard tongue', the penstemons have showy trumpet shaped flowers held on spikes that rise upright above the lanceolate foliage. The infertile stamen is typically long and often hairy and protrudes from the flower's mouth, thus the name beard tongue. The flower spikes rise above the foliage, and most will blossom from June through September. Species range in heights from 4 inches to very tall 6 feet or more!

Both tall and low-growing species have been naturalized and hybridized, so there are varieties suitable to rock gardens as well as perennial borders. The low-growing ones generally have masses of smaller flowers, and are closely related to wild species. Their foliage is generally evergreen, and the plants are hardy to zone 4. They form a low mound of green foliage from which the spikes of trumpet flowers rise.

Tall penstemons are best grown in borders as grouped specimens, with many newer hybrids developed from the Mexican species. Hardy only in zones 8 and 9, most will require winter mulching or to be treated as annuals. If given their ideal conditions – dry sandy soil, full sun and low humidity, they will grow well. These taller types make very attractive cut flowers. Although not very hardy, they are easy to propagate from cuttings. In fall, do not cut back the plants, as the old stems will help protect the plant's crown through winter.

Some of the penstemon hybrids that have been developed for cultivation are as follows:

Barbatus hybrids: These are the hardiest, growing in zones 3 - 9. They all form a mound of foliage with spikes of flowers rising above. Moderately drought and heat resistant, they grow quite vigorously and will need dividing every second year. The different varieties of these hybrids show flower spikes from 12 to 24 inches, ranging in color from pink through deep scarlet to a vivid purple. The



taller cultivars of Barbatus type, Coccineus with deep scarlet blooms and Prairie Dusk with rose-purple flowers, make good cut flowers.

Digitalis Husker Red: This recent hybrid developed in the US is hardy through zones 4 - 9. It has upright clumps of maroon tinted stems and foliage that retain color all season. Spikes of pale pink blossoms rise above it to a height of 30 inches. This was selected as the 1996 Perennial Plant of the Year.

Fruticosus Purple Haze: This native of BC's interior has low evergreen foliage that is covered with showy lilac-purple blooms in late spring. It cascades gracefully, so makes a suitable plant for rock gardens, the tops of walls or as an edging. It is very drought tolerant, and will thrive in zones 4 - 9 providing it has much sun and well draining soil.

Taller hybrids: These are the showiest varieties, putting on a wonderful display of color in summer and fall. The plants form a bushy upright clump, sending up several spikes of large trumpet flowers. These are the penstemons that are hardy only in the very temperate zones 8 and 9. They will require winter mulching to survive, and are better treated as annuals in cooler zones.

Two of these are:

King George: This beauty shows salmon-red flowers with a white throat on spikes rising 24 inches. At first glimpse, this looks like a red foxglove.

Sour Grapes: Large pale purple flowers rise on 28 inch spikes.

Each year more choices of penstemon hybrids appear on the market, developed from the 250 species of penstemon. Grow penstemons not just for the showy flower spikes, but also to attract butterflies and hummingbirds to your flower gardens and borders.



Hardy Geraniums

Go Anywhere Charmers

When most of us think of geraniums, a picture of the tender prima donna geraniums that we can find in every nursery, home improvement garden section or grocery store in spring. While these bedding plants are lovely in their own right, if you have not yet explored the hardy geraniums, commonly called cranesbills, then you're missing out on a whole group of garden-worthy perennials that can add beauty and charm to your garden.



Let's ignore the tender geraniums –genus *Pelargonium* – and look at only the hardy cranesbill perennials. These wonderfully various plants are excellent in a large variety of garden habitats, and are a good addition to containers. They come in a wide range of colors, heights and forms, so will suit almost any garden purpose. While some can be almost invasive spreaders, others will make good single plants in a border.

Most will tolerate full sun, but the geraniums do best in a partly shady spot. Blooms usually show in May, and can last through fall. If you find that the blooming is fading in hot summers and the foliage is looking scraggly, simply trim back the plant and water it well. This will start a new flush of blooms and foliage that will last the rest of the summer and through fall. Keep pruning off the dead flower heads as well so flowering is continuous.

Plant cranesbill geraniums in soil that is moderately fertile and well drained. Too much fertilizer, especially nitrogen, will give you lots of greenery but fewer flowers. Fertilize them only once, in spring. Water well, and do not allow the soil to dry out between waterings. Having an automatic watering system can prevent this from happening. Mulching your plants in spring will also help retain moisture.

Geranium seeds can be sown outside in spring, or you can propagate plants by taking cuttings from your existing plants in spring. When the plants have grown to a large clump, you can divide them. This will re-invigorate the parent plant as

well as giving you more of these versatile plants to give away, sell, or enjoy yourself.

All of these hardy geraniums will thrive in zones 5 - 9, and many will do well in even cooler climates. All have divided or lobed leaves that form a mat or mound of foliage. The cup or star shaped 5-petaled flowers appear early, and varieties will show blossom colors from white through pinks to lavender and blues.

Some of the best cultivars are:

Macrorhizum: This is a border type of geranium, with a densely growing mat of fragrant leaves. Magenta pink flowers show in early summer. It is heat tolerant, making it a good choice massed for large groundcover areas. Each plant grows to 12 inches in height and will cover a 24 inch diameter area. The foliage has a glowing orangey-red color in fall.

Sanguineum: As the name implies, this one is called the bloody cranesbill. It has a low spreading mat of fine leaves that turn a brilliant red in fall and very showy bright magenta flowers. Good as a groundcover or as an edging plant.



Clarkei: One of the taller cranesbill geraniums, this grows to a height of around 18 inches. Its deeply cut dark green foliage forms a low mound. The blooms are white, large and cup shaped with violet veins. This is an excellent white flower choice for a perennial border.

Endressii: This is the most commonly available cultivar of the cranesbills. Growing to 24 inches tall, with vigorous foliage of shiny green and showy bright pink flowers, it makes a good border or edging plant. Clip this one hard in midsummer to encourage continuous blooming through August and September.

One last geranium to mention is Rozanne. Voted 'Perennial of the Year' in 2008,



this one has large cup-shaped blue-violet blooms with whitish centers. It will flower from spring right through to frost. Many other cultivars are available, and all of them will make interesting additions to your perennial collections.

Campanulas

Old Fashioned Charm for the Border

Campanulas, commonly known as bellflowers, are one of the most popular groups of perennials. They vary in height from low creeping alpines to tall majestic spikes for the back of a border. All campanulas prefer a sunny exposure and well drained soil that is moderately rich, although many will thrive in partial shade.



Their bell-shaped flowers are usually blue, but can range from violet, lavender and rose to white. The tall varieties make superb cut flowers. The dwarf varieties are suited for rock gardens, containers and small flower beds. If you have a natural or woodland area, bellflowers are a perfect choice.

The flowers are, as the name implies, bell shaped, but vary considerably from one type to another. They all have five fused petals, but the tips may be rounded, pointed or flared. Some are upright bells, while others droop. Some flowers are single, others formed in clusters.

Some of the most desirable perennial Campanula cultivars are:

Birch hybrid. This outstanding variety has trailing stems that are smothered with nodding indigo flowers. It is a choice rock garden plant that will bloom all summer. It usually grows to about 6 inches tall, and does well in zones 4 - 9.

Carpatica: The Carpathian bellflower grows in compact clumps up to 9 inches tall. It bears large upright cup shaped flowers from June through September. It is a good rock garden plant or makes a good edging. The many varieties can have flowers ranging from deep cobalt blue through many shades of blue to white.

Persicifolia, known as the peach-leaved bellflower, grows up to 3 feet tall. Its large blue or white flowers are on strong stems, perfect for cutting. This is one of the

more common old fashioned perennials. It often self-seeds, and is very easy to grow, but its height may require staking.

Glomerata: The clustered bellflower has large clusters of violet-purple flowers. It is a good cut flower in early summer, blooming only in June and July in most gardens. This bellflower grows to 24 inches, and will need to be divided often to keep it healthy and vibrant.

Rotundifolia, commonly referred to as the bluebell of Scotland, is a native North American wildflower. Airy masses of nodding blue flowers are set on wiry stems that rise from 12 to 20 inches. It grows best in cool summer areas, and even thrives at high elevations. This lovely native flower will bloom all summer long, and is a wonderful addition to woodland gardens.

The universal appeal of these blue bell-shaped flowers makes all types of Campanulas – annual and biennial campanulas as well as perennial varieties – a popular addition to many cottage style gardens.



A Bluebell Wood:



Achillea

A Perennial for Sunny Gardens



Achillea, commonly known as yarrow is a very versatile and easy-to-grow perennial that adds fernlike foliage and umbels of bright blooms atop tall stems to the sunny perennial border. Achillea is hardy through zones 2 - 9, making it a suitable addition to almost every perennial garden.

Native to many parts of the Northern hemisphere, these drought tolerant plants will bloom over summer and into fall. The native variety, attractive in its own right, can spread quite rapidly by sending out rhizomes. Although the native yarrow is too invasive for garden use, many cultivars of yarrow have been developed as ornamentals.

Achillea sp. are easily recognized by the feathery and hairy leaves that form a basal clump and grow in a circular pattern along the stems. The stems, crowned with the flat flower heads, can grow up to a meter tall, depending on the variety. Both the foliage and the leaves have a strong aroma which can be unpleasant to some people.

Yarrow should be planted in soils that are not too fertile or moist, or it may develop root rot. It tolerates dry and hot conditions very well. A few cultivated varieties will need to be divided every three or four years while others will not need dividing for some time.. As the plants blossom throughout the summer,

deadhead them regularly to extend the bloom period. All varieties have flat topped clusters of flowers superb for cutting or drying.

Some varieties of Achillea that are readily available are:

Coronation Gold: One of the best choices, this hybrid reaches heights of 3 feet, and shows bright yellow flat clusters of blossoms. It may require staking. It should be divided every two to three years or the plant will lose its vigor. Avoid over watering or fertilizing.

Anthea: This newer hybrid variety is a tall upright plant, growing to 3 feet. It has intensely silver foliage on a bushy base clump. The large clusters of flowers open to a primrose yellow, fading to a pale yellow. It tolerates heat and drought conditions quite well.

Moonshine: This popular variety has silvery gray leaves and large clusters of bright canary yellow flowers that bloom all summer long. It is a non-spreading type, considered one of the best for landscape use. Moonshine usually grows to a height of 2 feet.



Tomentosa: This is often called woolly yarrow. The short stems topped with lemon-yellow flowers rise above the carpet-forming foliage. This drought tolerant plant is very suitable for rock gardens.

Millefolium: This is the common yarrow, and supplies old fashioned cut flowers in white, pastel lavender or deep crimson red clusters. It is medium height,

very drought tolerant, but tends to spread. It can be very useful as a groundcover on steep slopes.

Galaxy hybrids: These are a group of fairly new hybrids that come in a range of colors. With strong stems and large flower heads, they make good cut flowers, and also dry well. The colors range through lavender, lilac pink, peach, creamy white, and crimson red, depending on the hybrid. All bloom from June through September.

Achillea teams well with other flowering perennials in the border, adding contrast when planted with blue or purple flowering plants. It looks If you are looking for one perennial to add to your sunny border or rock garden, Achillea is one you should definitely consider.

Oriental Poppies

Vivid Color for Your Borders



Oriental poppies can light up any perennial flower bed or border with their vibrant blooms in early summer. They belong to the *Papaver* genus, which includes over 50 species, both annual and perennial. Poppies are native to many areas, including Europe, Asia, Australia, North America and South Africa.

Oriental poppies were first introduced into France and Holland from eastern Turkey in the 19th century. The development of many of the cultivars we enjoy can be credited to Amos Perry of England. In 1906 he found a pink flowering poppy among his red ones. Later, he developed a white one. Since then, many gardeners and horticulturists have created varieties ranging in colors from white with eggplant-black blotches to true pinks and orange pinks to oranges and reds and deep maroons.

All show a rosette of hairy deep green leaves that are deeply cut and up to 25 cm in length. The plants, in bloom, can be as much as four feet tall. From this basal rosette of fern-like foliage rise erect majestic stems that bear the striking blooms. They can measure up to 15 cm in diameter.

The blossom has four petals each showing a dark basal blotch. The petals are bowl shaped around a central crown that features many stamens surrounding a

central oblong pistil. Atop the pistil is the round ribbed stigma. Once the plant is fertilized and the petals drop, the seed pods are attractive in their own right.

Oriental poppies grow best in ordinary soil that is kept slightly dry, and in full sun. If they are placed in a shady or semi-shady area, they become leggy and may die out. As blooms drop their petals, clip them off to encourage new blossoming.



Seedheads left to ripen can be collected for seed, or allowed to self seed. Left on the plant, they will also add interest to your winter garden. As the flowering season ceases, the foliage will die down until spring.

Propagation

It is possible to propagate these poppies from root cuttings or division in early spring or just after the flowering ceases. If done in late summer, the new rootlings will have the autumn to grow roots and recover.

Divide the roots into 10cm lengths and insert the cuttings into sandy soil. Space the new

plants – or purchased ones – at least 30 cm apart. Mulch around them with organic compost, and water well at first. Once established, they require little water.

If you collect your own seeds, plant them in the fall in a flat. They require frost to germinate. In spring, the new shoots will appear and should be potted up singly. They can be transplanted to the garden beds when they grow to a 4 inch size. Oriental poppies can also be grown from commercial seed mixtures. The resulting seedlings will possibly vary in color from plant to plant, which can add more variety to the garden.

Hostas

The Perfect Shade Perennial

Hostas are a beautiful and very diverse group of hardy perennials that are, quite literally, made for shade. They grow best in a spot that receives filtered shade throughout the day. You probably won't choose hostas for their flowers. It's the stunning and diverse foliage that is the attraction with these plants. With hundreds of cultivars to choose from, you may have difficult choices to make!



Hostas can range in size from a mere 2 inches high to well over 3 feet high. A few supersized ones can even eventually top out around 5 feet! With leaves that cover a huge range of sizes, shapes and colors, you have a lot to choose from. Leaves can be lanceolate, round or oval shaped. Some leaves are smooth, others cupped or rolled at the edges. Some are about the size of a teaspoon, while others are over a foot across.

The most stunning feature of hostas is their colorful foliage. Almost every color can be present, with the exception of red. They show many shades of green, from yellow-green to chartreuse to blue green and dark green. Others have bright gold colored leaves or blue leaves. Notably, many hosta varieties have variegated leaves in many combinations of patterns and colors, including white.

Because they come in such a wide range of heights and habits, hostas can be placed in many spots in the yard. The low-growing ones make great easy-care edgings for borders or along pathways. Tuck the mid-sized ones into spaces

between your flowering perennials, where they will add a lot of foliage interest. Choose the largest ones as a backdrop for flowering perennials, or plant a clump of hostas around the base of a tree where the shade prevents other plants from thriving.

Hostas are hardy perennials, coming up each year with fresh foliage. The buds will show in early spring, and the plants will continue to grow new leaves right through summer and into fall, dying back as winter sets in. Each season, the clumps get larger and the leaves showier.



They need no special cultivation, but will love to have good compost added when first planted and balanced fertilizer every spring. Hostas will reach their full maturity in 3 to 5 years. They are easy to divide.

Simply dig up the whole plant in spring, just as the buds show. Divide the mass with your flat spade, and replant the sections. Just remember to give your hostas enough

room when you plant them. They can spread out and up quite quickly.

What if you don't have shady spots for hostas? There are varieties of hostas that can tolerate morning sun, as long as they are grown in constantly moist soil. Green or gold foliaged hostas seem to do the best in partly sunny spots.

Check catalogs or the nursery for ones labeled as sun-resistant or sun-tolerant. Many of these also have fragrant flowers. The white or lavender flowers have a perfume that intensifies in the evening, so plant these varieties in an area where you like to relax at day's end.



Eryngiums

An Exotic Accent in Your Perennial Border



One of the most interesting ornamental perennials for a hot and sunny spot is Eryngium, commonly called sea holly. This plant tolerates hot dry sites, and even grows well in salty soils – perhaps why it is called sea holly. Species of this plant are native to areas of South and North America and Europe, some found in grasslands and others native to coastal areas. Eryngium has both annual and perennial varieties.

The hardy perennial Eryngiums can be grown in zones 4 to 9, with some species even tolerating zone 2 temperatures. If you decide to include Eryngium in your perennial gardens, make sure they are in a sunny and well drained spot. Most will do well in poor soil, but others prefer a more fertile soil. Plant them from purchased bedding plants in early spring, and space them to leave room for the mature plant. The plants will form a clump that can be divided for increase in the spring. It is also possible to propagate sea hollies by taking stem cuttings, or to grow them from seed.

Hairless spiny leaves and dome-like umbels of tiny flowers rising above a whorl of prickly bracts make sea hollies easily identifiable. The thistle-like flowers are usually cobalt blue, but some varieties have either white or greenish blossoms. With leaves and bracts varying from silvery gray to a rich blue, these add texture and stunning color to any perennial border. Expect blooms to appear in June or July, and continuous blooming should last through August and into September. These striking plants can range from a small 15 inches to over ten feet!

Listed here are just a few of the varieties of Eryngium that are available:

Amethystium: The amethyst sea holly has gray-green leaves with silver and white markings. This plant reaches a height of 3 feet, and has branching stems with small metallic blue flowers and spiny silver bracts. It blooms profusely in full sun, and because of its spread and fullness, makes a good filler plant in a dry sunny spot.



Alpinium: Extremely large heads of steel-blue flowers with prickly bracts the same color are typical of this sea holly. Probably the showiest of the Eryngiums, this one is excellent for both cutting and drying. The plant is generally about 24 inches tall, and fairly compact in growth.

Planum "silver salentino": This is a newly developed Planum cultivar with white cones of flowers atop silvery bracts. Even the stems are pearly in color, rising from dark green basal leaves with hints of red.



Giganteum: This unique sea holly, sometimes called Miss Willmott's Ghost, has very large silvery-grey flower bracts from which a silvery green cone of flowers rises. This cone can be up to 4 inches in height! The stunning flowers on their stiff stems make good cut flowers or dried flowers. It is an excellent specimen plant, standing 3 feet above the spineless rosette of basal leaves. Not a long-lived plant, but it will readily self-seed.

Yuccifolium: This native North American species of Eryngium is sometimes called the Rattlesnake Master! It was at one time used as an antidote for rattlesnake bites. The bristly sword-shaped evergreen leaves are arranged at the plant's base, similar to a yucca. Tall stems with creamy green ball shaped flowers in branched clusters rise 4 feet above.

With more interesting cultivars of Eryngiums being developed by plant breeders continually, you will want to add at least one of these to your sunny perennial border. The silvers and blues they add and the extraordinary spiky flowers will stand out, adding contrast, texture and an exotic touch.

Heucheras

Amazing Foliage and Delicate Flowers

You could create a garden with every color of the rainbow with just one group of plants – Heucheras, also known as alumroot or coralbells. In previously unimagined foliage colors ranging from almost black through to silver, heucheras specimens probably have more variety in their leaf color than any other perennial, hands down. These garden gems were first grown for their early delicate summer flowers that rise in stems above the basal leaves, but now it is the beautiful foliage that tempts most gardeners.



Heucheras are amazing varied perennials that will do very well in zones 4 through 9, Native to North America, and part of the Saxifrage family, they show a basal rosette of foliage that gives rise to spikes of small bell shaped flowers in spring or summer. The leaves are palmate with three to five lobes set on long petioles. Both pest and disease resistant, heucheras make a good garden or woodland plant.

Coralbells will do well in part shade in most zones, and in cooler climates will do well in more sun. Grow them in humus rich moist well-draining soil, with shade in the hotter parts of the day. The best locations for heucheras are in the front of a border or in a rock garden where the delicate flowers and colorful leaves can be easily seen and admired.

They work well interspersed with other foliage plants, such as hostas or ferns. Heucheras also provide year-round garden interest, since the foliage is evergreen, and so add a presence when other perennials have gone dormant. Divide the clumps every three years, replanting the sections so the crown is just at soil level.

Earlier cultivars were bred for the flowers, producing the garden variety of coralbells with clusters of delicate and graceful greenish white, pink or red flower spikes rising to 2 feet above the clump of foliage. With the hybrids developed over the past years, many different varieties of heuchera have been introduced. Most have been bred for the stunning foliage that can be near-black, deep purple,

brown, red, gold, caramel and cream, often with exotic metallic markings or mottlings of white and silver.

Some of the most recent cultivars available are:

Amethyst Myst: Amethyst colored leaves with silvery tints form a tight 9 inch mound of foliage.

Black Beauty: Blackish red ruffled leaves and creamy white flowers on 2 foot stems, this looks great with lighter chartreuse specimens.

Christa: The foliage starts as a rosy purple, and matures to peachy orange with silver overtones, forming a mound about 10 inches.



Green Spice: A very shade tolerant cultivar with broad green leaves with silver overtones and red veining.

Chocolate Ruffles: Enormous ruffled leaves, chocolate brown on top and burgundy below. Creamy flowers on tall purple stems make good cut flowers.

Regina: With burgundy leaves that bear silver markings and light pink flowers on 3 foot tall stems, this is an outstanding perennial.



Peach Melba: The peach to orange foliage changes color with the seasons, this shorter heuchera is also fairly drought resistant and deer-resistant.

Palace Purple: Deep purple spring foliage fades to a bronzy brown or green in summer. This was a Perennial Plant of the Year in 1991, and still an excellent choice.

These are just a few of the many cultivars that have been developed, and with exciting and unique new ones made available annually, you will soon become a fan of these showy foliage perennials.