

## Late Summer Blooming Perennials

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Is your perennial garden looking a little dull this time of year? Many gardens look great in the spring and early summer, only to fizz out come August. The following plants will bloom through the dog days of summer and beyond:

**Canna** (*Canna x generalis*) - The canna lily is an old southern favorite. It spends all summer producing large, tropical-looking leaves and doesn't decide to bloom until later in the season. Some varieties are grown for showy flowers in shades of yellow, red, pink and orange, others for their beautifully colored or patterned leaves. The varieties with showy foliage are my favorites as they make fun color combinations with other plants all summer long. Try 'Bengal Tiger', with its yellow and green pinstriped leaves, or 'Phaison', with stripes of purple, yellow and red. 'Australia' has solid, deep purple foliage. Cannas grow best with full sun, average soil and lots of water, but tolerate drought very well. They range in height from one foot tall dwarf specimens to eight foot tall giants and everywhere in between.

**Moonbeam Coreopsis** (*Coreopsis verticillata* 'Moonbeam') - Although it takes awhile to get going in the spring, Moonbeam Coreopsis makes up for it later. This low-growing plant (it tops out at about a foot) smothers itself in butter-yellow daisies all summer long— just give it full sun and well-drained soil. Try it combined with blues or purples— I have mine planted at the foot of my 'Royal Red' (it's really purple) butterfly bush, where it softens the bare stems. To extend the bloom season into fall, shear the plant back by about one-third when blooming lulls in late summer. In a few weeks, it will be going strong. Moonbeam Coreopsis was named the 1992 Perennial Plant of the Year by the Perennial Plant Association.

**Dahlia** (*Dahlia* hybrids) - We're lucky in South Carolina— we don't have to dig up our dahlias every fall like they do up north. Dahlias are hardy perennials for us, and late summer is their time to shine. They do need a little bit of pampering, though. Dahlias need rich, well-drained soil, at least half a day of sun and plenty of water to look their best. There are dwarf varieties and some that grow to six feet tall. Flowers can be only an inch or two wide or as big as a dinner plate— and they come in every color of the rainbow, except blue.

**Purple Coneflower** (*Echinacea purpurea*) - Who doesn't like purple coneflower? My nephew loves to touch the tops of the flowers with his hand to feel their hard and slightly prickly texture. I like the long-lasting, daisy-like flowers in that unusual shade of mauve-purple. Birds love the seeds— and if they don't get them all, you'll have lots of seedling purple coneflowers to share. Purple coneflower grows three to four feet tall and like full sun, but it will also tolerate some shade.

**Gaura** (*Gaura lindheimeri*) - This native plant is covered all summer in little white flowers that resemble tiny butterflies. If cut back to a little over a foot tall in July after the first flush of bloom, it will send up new stems and bloom again until fall. Gaura grows best in full sun and well-drained soil and is very drought tolerant due to its long taproot. Although gaura can grow five feet tall, it will remain shorter if cut back mid-summer.

**Shasta Daisy** (*Leucanthemum* 'Becky') - This sun-loving daisy was named the 2003 Perennial Plant of the Year by the Perennial Plant Association, no small feat. It starts blooming in early summer and just doesn't stop, especially if the old flowers are removed regularly. The yellow and white daisies open atop sturdy stems, making them very wind-resistant and great for cutting. The three to four foot tall clump multiplies quickly, so it's easy to share with friends.

**Black-Eyed Susan** (*Rudbeckia fulgida* var. *sullivantii* 'Goldsturm') - This popular, sun-loving perennial shows up in many gardens, and for good reason. It tolerates poor soil and drought, blooms its head off from early summer to fall, and combines well with lots of other plants. Its only bad quality (if you can call it that) is its ability to multiply with lightning speed. 'Goldsturm' grows about three feet tall and was honored by the Perennial Plant Society as the 1999 Perennial Plant of the Year.

**Mexican Bush Sage** (*Salvia leucantha*) - This is one of my favorite late bloomers. While it doesn't always over-winter here in South Carolina, I enjoy it as an annual, knowing I may need to replant it the following spring. Its long, deep purple flower spikes don't appear until August or September, but they're in full force until frost knocks them down. The plant can grow from a tiny transplant to a lush, four foot tall and wide bush by the middle of summer - just give it full sun and well-drained soil. Excellent drainage will improve its chances of over-wintering, as will leaving the stems standing until spring.

**Autumn Joy Sedum** (*Sedum* 'Autumn Joy') - This is probably one of the most drought tolerant perennials out there and looks good combined with lots of other late season stars like Salvias, Black-Eyed Susans and Moonbeam Coreopsis. The flower buds start out pale green, then progress to pale pink, dark pink and finally a nice, rusty red color. The flowers persist all winter and should be cut back in the spring. Autumn Joy Sedum grows between one and two feet tall and prefers full sun and well-drained soil.