

Low-Maintenance Perennials: *Plants & Maintenance*

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A PERENNIAL plant:

- Lives for two or more years
- May be herbaceous (non-woody stems) or woody
- Herbaceous perennial examples:
Achillea, Coreopsis, Echinacea, Liatris, Phlox

Herbaceous perennial plants:



Woody perennial plants:

- Maintain a persistent stem above ground during cold weather
- May or may not lose leaves in cold weather
- Examples: *Lavandula*, *Perovskia*, *Rosmarinus*

Woody perennial plants:



Photo: Sima Kagan



Rosmarinus officinalis
Rosemary
Photo by Michael Moore

Low-maintenance perennials

- Do not need staking under normal conditions
- Are winter cold hardy and summer heat tolerant
- Are resistant to recurring insect and disease infestations
- Do not need to be divided for at least three years
- Possess attractive foliage during entire growing season

Low-maintenance perennials

- Are specific to place and environment
- Prefer well-drained, moderately fertile soil
- Require ample moisture
- Prefer a pH of 5.5-7.0
- Need to be divided every 3 years (in many cases)

Amsonia hubrechtii

- Arkansas amsonia
- Full sun/part shade
- 36" h x 48" w
- Sky blue blooms in late spring
- Bright yellow foliage in fall
- Zones 3-9



Amsonia tabernaemontana

- Blue star
- Full sun/part shade
- 24-36" h x 18" w
- Periwinkle blue blooms in late spring
- Zones 3-9



Anemone hupehensis var. *japonica*

- Japanese anemone
- Full sun/part shade
- 4-5' h x 2' w
- Pale pink semi-double blooms in late summer through early autumn
- Attractive seed pods
- Zones 3-9



Athyrium nipponicum 'Pictum'

- Japanese painted fern
- Part shade
- 8-12" h x 15-18" w
- Lance shaped silver gray green leaves with maroon midribs
- 'Ursula's Red' bred in SC
- Zones 5-8



Asarum canadense

- Canadian wild ginger
- Part to full shade
- 6" h x 6" w
- Heart shaped leaves
- Brown bell shaped flowers hidden by foliage in spring
- Zones 2-8



Astilbe x arendsii

- Hybrid astilbe
- Part to full shade
- 18"-4' h x 24" w
- Fern like foliage
- Cultivars range from pink, to red, white, to lavender purple
- Zones 4-8



Baptisia australis

- False indigo blue
- Sun to part shade
- 5' h x 2' w
- Fern like foliage
- Tiny deep blue blooms in early summer
- Deep blue to black seed pods
- Zones 3-9



Caryopteris x clandonensis

- Blue beard
- Sun to part shade
- 3' h x 5' w
- Flowers on current years growth (woody)
- Small but abundant blue to purple blooms in late summer to early autumn
- 'Dark Knight' has deep blue blooms
- Zones 6-9



Coreopsis verticillata 'Moonbeam'

- Threadleaf coreopsis
- Sun
- 18" h x 18" w
- Pale yellow blooms from summer through early fall
- Fine textured foliage
- Zones 4-9



Cuphea hyssopifolia

- Mexican heather
- Sun to partial shade
- 12-24" h x 8-32" w
- Tiny pink to purple to white flowers from summer into autumn
- Woody stems
- Zones 8-10



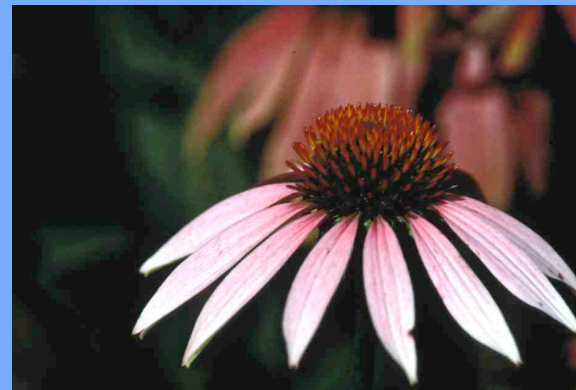
Delosperma cooperi

- Purple hardy ice plant
- Sun
- 4-8" h x 24" w
- Daisy-like glossy purple flowers in mid to late summer
- Woody stems
- Zones 6-10



Echinacea purpurea

- Purple coneflower
- Sun
- 4' h x 18" w
- Rosy-purple flowers in midsummer to autumn
- Zones 3-9



Foeniculum vulgare 'Purpureum'

- Bronze fennel
- Sun
- 6' h x 18" w
- Bronze purple foliage is finely cut and feathery on tips
- Zones 4-9



Gaura lindheimeri

- White gaura
- Sun
- 5' h x 3' w
- Pink buds open to white blooms late spring to early autumn
- Slender stems and leaves
- "Siskiyou Pink" cultivar
- Zones 5-9



Hedychium coccineum



- Red ginger lily
- Sun or partial shade
- 10' h x 3' w
- Deep red, pink, orange, or white blooms in up to 10" long racemes in late summer to autumn
- Long lance shaped leaves
- Zones 8-10



Hedychium coronarium

- White ginger lily
- Sun or partial shade
- 10' h x 3' w
- Fragrant white blooms in up to 8" long racemes in mid to late summer
- Long lance shaped leaves
- Zones 9-10



Helianthus angustifolius

- Swamp sunflower
- Sun or partial shade
- 5-7' h x 4' w
- Daisy-like flower heads up to 3" across in late summer early autumn
- Rough hairy stems and narrow lance shaped leaves to 8"
- Zones 6-9



Helleborus orientalis

- Lenten rose
- Full to partial shade
- 18" h x 18" w
- Nodding saucer shaped white flowers often stained green and pale pink, in midwinter to midspring
- Basal leathery leaves evergreen
- Zones 4-9



Hemerocallis hybrids

- Daylily
- Full sun
- 6-48" h x 12-36" w
- Wide color range of blooms; 'Hyperion' & 'Happy Returns' are yellow
- Basal leathery leaves evergreen
- Zones 3-10



Iris sibirica 'Caesar's Brother'

- Siberian iris
- Full sun to partial shade
- 36" h x 24-36" w
- Deep purple beardless flowers in early summer
- Leaves are narrow and grass-like
- Zones 3-9



Kniphofia uvaria

- Common torch lily
- Full sun to partial shade
- 4' h x 4' w
- Red buds open to orange and fade to yellow in summer
- Zones 3-9



Lavandula stoechas

- French lavender
- Full sun
- 24" h x 24" w
- Spikes of fragrant deep purple blooms topped by purple bracts in late spring to summer
- Subspecies *pedunculata* Spanish lavender, bears flowers well above foliage
- Fragrant silver green foliage
- Zones 8-9



Liatris spicata 'Kobold'

- Spike gayfeather
- Full sun
- 24" h x 24" w
- Pinkish purple flower spikes in mid-late summer into autumn
- 'Kobold' does not need staking
- Zones 3-9



Muhlenbergia capillaris

- Pink muhly grass
- Full sun
- 4' h x 3' w
- Airy pink blooms in late summer
- Narrow grass leaves
- Zones 6-10



Perovskia atriplicifolia



- Russian sage
- Full sun
- 4' h x 4' w
- Lavender blue blooms from summer into fall
- Silver green fragrant foliage
- Zones 3-9



Phlox paniculata 'David'

- Garden phlox
- Full sun. partial shade
- 4' h x 2-3' w
- White fragrant blooms in summer
- 'David' is resistant to powdery mildew
- Zones 3-8





Polygonatum odoratum 'Variegatum'

- Fragrant Solomon's seal
- Partial to full shade
- 3' h x 2' w
- Pendent white blooms along stems in late spring or early summer
- Arching stems with white margined leaves
- Zones 4-8



Rosmarinus officinalis

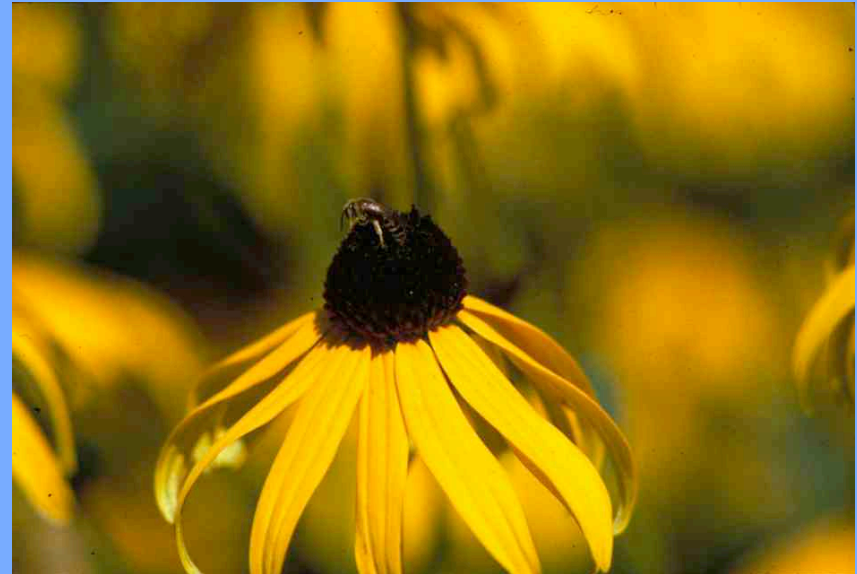
- Rosemary
- Full sun
- 4' h x 4' w
- Whorls of tiny blue blooms from midspring into summer and again in autumn
- Fragrant evergreen leaves on woody stems
- Zones 8-10



Rosmarinus officinalis
Rosemary
Photo by Michael Moore

Rudbeckia fulgida var. *sullivantii* 'Goldsturm'

- Black-eyed-Susan
- Full sun
- 36" h x 18" w
- Daisy-like yellow flowers with a mahogany disk from summer into autumn
- Fragrant evergreen leaves on woody stems
- Zones 4-9



Salvia greggii



- Autumn sage
- Full sun
- 12-20" h x 12-20" w
- Pairs of red to purple, pink, yellow, or violet flowers from late summer into autumn
- Woody evergreen
- Zones 7-9



Salvia uliginosa



- Bog sage
- Full sun and moist soil
- Up to 6' h x 13" w
- Blue flowers in late summer to mid autumn
- Zones 8-10



Santolina rosmarinifolia (virens)

- Lavender cotton
- Full sun
- Up to 24" h x 24" w
- Yellow button-like blooms in mid to late summer
- Zones 6-9



Scabiosa columbaria 'Butterfly Blue' and 'Pink Mist'

- Scabious
- Full sun
- Up to 24" h x 30" w
- Pincushion like blooms appear during summer and winter
- Zones 5-8



Solidago rugosa 'Fireworks'

- Goldenrod
- Full sun
- 24-36" h x 24-36" w
- Yellow blooms in late summer and autumn
- Zones 4-8



Low-Maintenance perennials in the landscape

- Require intensive planning, design, selection, and installation
- Are selected for foliage color and texture as well as bloom
- Reduce pesticide usage
- Reduce maintenance

Sissinghurst white garden



Fred McGourtey's perennial border, Conn.



Hidcote red border



Hosta glen, SCBG, Clemson, SC



Herb Garden, New York



Seabrook Island, SC



Success in the landscape

- Well-drained fertile soil
- Proper sun exposure
- Proper planting techniques
- Proper placement and spacing
- Mulch
- Proper maintenance

Soil preparation

- Test soil and follow laboratory recommendations for organic matter and fertilizer
- Till soil 15-18" deep
- Increase drainage and fertility by tilling organic matter (rotted manure, leaf mold peat moss, etc.) into soil
- Raised beds or berms may promote drainage
- Avoid walking or driving on flower bed soil to prevent compaction; especially wet soil

Soil tips

- Drainage is essential for healthy plants
- Moderate fertility is the goal for healthy plants
- Planting too deep can cause crown rot, an ancient perennial hazard
- All plants require moisture, especially during drought, for best display
- Water deeply, but only when the soil is dry or almost dry
- Vegetative mulch increases soil organic matter content as it decomposes
- Avoid compacting soil

Proper sun exposure

- Plants requiring full sun should receive 6 or more hours of unobstructed sunlight per day
- With inadequate sunlight, perennials may:
 - Bloom less or not at all
 - Stretch toward the light
 - Appear leggy
 - Exhibit faded foliar color

Sun seeking perennials



Proper sun exposure

- Plants requiring part shade should receive less than 5 hours of direct sunlight per day
- Prefer shade from afternoon sun
- Plants receiving too much sun may:
 - Exhibit foliar browning
 - Appear stunted
 - Show faded foliar color

Sun scorched perennials



Needs shade from sun



Proper shaded sun exposure

Proper planting techniques

- Plant right plant in the right place
- Fall planting is best because it provides time for perennial roots to become established before onset of summer heat and drought
- Loosen roots before placing in planting hole
- Crown of plant should be level with the ground or slightly higher

Planting techniques (cont.)

- Eliminate air pockets by firmly pressing soil around roots
- Water and mulch



Proper placement and spacing

- Mass planting is popular
- Space plants according to their mature widths and heights. Many perennials will be spaced 18" apart

Proper spacing



Avoid overcrowding

- Disease and insect problems
- Frequent division

Mulch

- Mulch should not touch the stem of the plant or cover the crown

Proper maintenance

- Mulch
- Fertilize
- Dead-head/grooming
- Weeding
- Watering
- Division

Maintenance-mulch

- Maintain 3-5" of mulch to:
 - Reduce weed seed germination
 - Conserve soil moisture
 - Maintain uniform soil temperature
 - Increase soil organic matter content
 - Keep foliage clean

Maintenance-fertilizing

- Follow soil test recommendations
- Use slow release nitrogen fertilizers when possible
- Place granular fertilizer 2-4” away from crowns of perennials
- Water fertilizer in deeply
- Water slowly to avoid leaching/runoff
- Wash all fertilizer granules off plant
- Do not apply fertilizer near a water body

Slow release fertilizers



Maintenance-deadheading/ grooming

- Remove spent flowers and dead flower stalks throughout growing season
 - Seed production reduces flowering
- In early winter cut back dead foliage

Maintenance-weeding

- Remove all weeds from flower beds as they:
 - Compete with desirable plants for water and nutrients
 - May harbor insect pests and disease organisms

Maintenance-watering

- Water should reach the entire root zone
- Water slow and deep
- Allow soil to dry slowly between waterings
- Drip or soaker hoses work well in flower beds and borders

Dangers of over-watering

- Consistently wet soil may lead to:
 - Crown-rot and root rot problems
 - Greater risk of soil compaction
 - Disregard for water quantity issues

Maintenance-division

- Most perennials need to be divided to maintain vigor
- Expect to divide most perennials at least every three years
- Typical symptoms of perennials needing division include:
 - Floppy foliage
 - Reduced flowering

Perennial needing to be divided



Divide perennial-sever outer roots

Use
sharp
tools



Find center



Divide in two (if center is healthy)

Discard center if it is bare



Smaller portions take longer to achieve normal size and flower production

Reset healthy roots and top



Firm soil, add mulch, and water



Perennial literature

Herbaceous Perennial Plants by Allan Armitage

Manual of Herbaceous Ornamental Plants
by Steven Still

Miracle-Gro Guide to Growing Beautiful Flowers, editor Denny Schrock, chapter author Ellen Strother (Vincent)

Contact information



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