

## Perennial gardening for year-round drama

Are you one of those gardeners who loves planting beds of annuals each year for that burst of color, but shies away from the perennials? You're not alone. Many enthusiastic gardeners believe perennial gardening is only for the experts, requiring too much maintenance, yields a short season of bloom and looks purely unattractive in winter. All of these reasons to discount perennial gardening are false! Let's take a look at how you can use perennials to create dramatic year-round effects that last many years, with far less effort than your annuals.

Perennial gardening does require a bit more planning, but careful choices, planted in the right location can add masses of color that put those annuals to shame!

Let's say you have a spot where you always plant those cheery marigolds to brighten the summer pathway to your front entry. Yes, it looks great in summer, but what about the other three seasons? Try lining the pathway with an evergreen spring bloomer to add interest and color to the pathway while waiting for those marigolds? Winter crocuses can be planted in the same bed. By the time their glory is spent, your marigolds will fill out and cover the dormant bulbs.

Perennial gardening allows for drifts of mixed perennials with overlapping bloom times, giving you a spectacular all-summer display. There are perennial varieties with long blooming seasons. Plant large drifts of such varieties interspersed with short bloomers for an ever-changing display of color.

Many perennials naturalize, spreading in clumps over a period of years. Creeping phlox spreads to form a thick, lush carpet of springtime color in the woodland garden. Other perennials, like agapanthas and daylilies need division every few years. For this effort, you gain new plants at no additional expense.

Perennial gardening offers colorful possibilities for every season. Choose a planting of Heavenly Bamboo for a fiery accent to the fall garden. Try Forsythia for a luminous yellow bush that lights up the late winter landscape. Rock cottonwood is an evergreen that looks handsome in all seasons, adding a bright note to your perennial landscaping with its bright red winter berries. A bed of cyclamens offer white, pink and magenta blooms during the dreariest winter days. Ornamental grasses, strategically placed amongst summer blooming plants can show their stuff to dramatic advantage in the winter months.

If you've hesitated with perennial gardening plans, visit your nursery or go online. Your local nursery worker can advise you of which perennials do well in your area and specific garden conditions. Online, you'll find plenty of articles

full of particulars on the many virtues of perennial gardening to get you started. You'll soon wonder how you managed to restrain yourself to those lovely but fleeting annuals!