



FLOWERS ON THE GOLF COURSE: WHAT'S NEW FOR '88?

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Spring is not as far away as it seems! It's time once again to order flowers for the golf course. Sure, it's easy to order the same plants every year — geraniums for that full-sun bed, and impatiens to brighten up the dark corner near the clubhouse. But why not try some new things this year? Try new plants, or new combinations of plants. Be creative!

Take advantage of what the plant breeders have done! For many years, flower breeders responded to the needs of greenhouse growers. The growers asked for plants that would flower at a younger age so that their production time would be reduced, and the flower breeders developed early cultivars. Growers asked for plants that would not get leggy during production, and plant breeders responded with compact plants. Some of the "new and improved" cultivars that were developed over the years may have been superior in greenhouse production, but they did not all perform satisfactorily in the landscape.

That has changed. In the past several years, flowers have become so important in the landscape that plant breeders have begun to respond to the needs of landscape gardeners. They have bred plants that suffer less damage from insects and diseases, produce increased numbers of flowers, and have the ability to withstand environmental stress. The results are quite outstanding. Why not try some of these new introductions?

THE NEW PERENNIALS

Perennials usually require a higher initial investment than annual flowers, but they are less expensive in the long run because they are permanent plantings. The one major drawback of perennials on the golf course has always been that most perennials have a fairly brief period of flowering, perhaps two to four weeks in the summer. In gardens where you want full color all season, perennials are

generally not good performers.

Of course, there are some exceptions — roses flower most of the summer, but they require a great deal of maintenance; some asters flower most of the summer but they tend to fall apart and develop poor form; rudbeckias flower for several weeks but they often develop unsightly powdery mildew.

One of the lowest-maintenance perennials is the daylily, but each individual plant has, in the past, produced flowers for only a few weeks. In recent years, there has been a great breakthrough in daylily breeding. 'Stella de Oro' daylily was introduced a few years ago, and is now widely available. 'Stella de Oro' ("Star of Gold") is a low-growing daylily, forming a clump about 18" tall. It produces yellow flowers very reliably from late May or early June through September. It's an ideal edging plant for a flower bed. Spaced 16"-24" on center along the edge of a flower bed, these plants will fill in and show good color by the second season. They are extremely hardy and rarely develop any pest problems.

An alternate use for this outstanding perennial is to use it as a groundcover in a full-sun or lightly shaded bed, interplanted with daffodils. The yellow daffodils will give good color in April, and their dying leaves will be covered by the developing daylily plants later in the summer.

Or, why not use a few clumps of 'Stella de Oro' in shrub borders?

Another perennial worth considering this spring is the mum, or garden chrysanthemum. More and more greenhouse growers are producing fall-flowering garden mums in spring, as 4" potted flowering bedding plants. These mums can be placed on the clubhouse dining tables for a week, then set outdoors in full flower, then cut back in early summer and pinched periodically until early July to promote

well-branched plants. The plants will flower again in fall.

Plant breeders have developed garden mums that flower early enough to give good color before frost, and many of them are quite hardy. Of course, to be certain that they will survive the harsh Midwest winter, you will want to mulch them. On the other hand, consider the fact that you purchased them as 4" flowering plants and they flowered a second time — perhaps you've already gotten your investment back from them.

White lilies have traditionally been considered marketable only at Easter. Growers estimate their production needs and grow enough potted lilies for the holiday, and often throw out or drastically mark down the price of those that don't sell for Easter.

Easter lilies are very hardy and durable perennials. If you see some on sale after Easter, buy them to plant into the back of your flower borders. Plant them a little deeper than they sat in the pots, cut the stems back to about 6" from the ground, and let the plant grow. They will send up another flower stalk in late summer, and will faithfully flower each year after.

Don't limit yourself to white lilies. Many hybrid lilies are available, in stunning colors. Asiatic hybrids such as 'Enchantment' (orange), 'Fire King' (scarlet), 'Connecticut King' (golden yellow) and 'Rosita' (dusty pink) are often potted up and sold in the spring by garden center and nursery operators. They produce clusters of large flowers on 20" to 24" stems. Plant clumps of them in groundcover beds in light shade, or in the back of your annual flower beds, or among the shrubs in a border.

Many perennials flower the first year from seed, but one has one special recognition this year. 'Snow Lady' Shasta daisy is an All-America Selections winner for 1988. It is the earliest Shasta daisy to flower on a dwarf plant. It reaches a height of 10", and produces 2½" white daisy flowers with yellow centers just sixteen weeks after the seeds are sown. Once in flower, it continues to produce blossoms until frost.

'Snow Lady' performs best in full sun. Try planting a line of them on 10-12" centers along the front of a flower garden. They will produce a perennial edging plant that will reliably flower each summer from mid-June until frost. Many growers are producing 'Snow Lady' this season.

THE NEW ANNUALS

Flowering cabbage and flowering kale have always attracted a great deal of attention in the autumn, when the falling night temperatures cause the plants' leaves to change from bluish-green to purple, pink or white. Unfortunately, these plants have always been rather unsightly until that time in the fall when they turn color. Newer cultivars of both flowering cabbage (broader, more open, less frilled leaves) and flowering kale (often somewhat tighter plants with frilled leaf edges) are more compact, staying attractive all summer and then becoming quite spectacular in the fall. They're worth a try.

Rather than planting them in the spring, why not plan for them this fall? Plant your flower beds as usual this spring, and contract with a grower to produce 5" or 6" pots of flowering cabbage and flowering kale to put in around the time the other annuals start to droop. They will give excellent color for several weeks after hard frost. Try a few around the clubhouse and in shrub borders.

Cannas are a traditional tender perennial seen in many public parks. The older types are 4' to 5' tall, often with very coarse-textured dark bronze leaves. These plants start to flower in midsummer and continue reliably until frost. Although the giant cannas are quite attractive, their size and boldness make them somewhat difficult to use. Why not try the smaller cannas? 'Los Angeles' is pale pink, and 'King City Gold' is pale yellow; both grow to be 3' tall.

The dwarf cultivars like 'Lucifer' (24" tall, red-and-yellow bicolor) and 'Primrose Yellow' (24" tall, solid yellow) are even easier to combine with other

flowers in the garden. Try them with blue salvias, blue agertums, or red geraniums.

When you think of planting annuals in a shady garden, you probably first think of impatiens. This excellent bedding plant can be highlighted with other outstanding tender perennial, the caladium. Caladiums have large heart-shaped leaves with red, pink or white markings. The plants reach a height of 16" to 18", and the clumps of broad colorful leaves rising from the ground are very tropical in appearance. Caladiums require evenly moist soil and medium shade — perfect for planting with impatiens. Select a good white-leaved cultivar like 'Candidum,' the most popular white type. Or try some of the newer types, with "strap" leaves. The leaves of these types are narrower and more numerous. 'Miss Muffet' has broad white markings along the leaf veins, with red speckles over the leaf surfaces. 'Red Frill' has leaves that are deep red, with green margins.

Among the other annuals to consider for this year's flower beds are herbs. Herbs have made a comeback in popularity in the past few years, and should be in good supply this spring. Look for ornamental basil such as Spicy Globe, which forms a 10" mound of tiny green leaves, or any of the red-leaved types. Red-leaved lettuce such as 'Red Sails,' a recent All-America Selections winner, and extra-curved parsley are also very attractive along the edge of flower gardens.

Two annual flowers were awarded All-America Selections honors for 1988. The first is Celosia 'New Look'. 'New Look' produces dwarf plants, about 10" to 14" in height and 8" to 10" in width. The foliage is vivid bronze and

the 4"-long plume-like flowers are scarlet. 'New Look' is the first dwarf celosia with bronze foliage. Celosia has long been popular for its ability to continue to produce flowers under hot conditions, either droughty or humid.

The second annual that was given an AAS award for 1988 is a petunia, 'Ultra Crimson Star.' The award given to this plant is AAS' first Bedding Plant Award, which implies superior performance both in the greenhouse and in the garden. 'Ultra Crimson Star' is a grandiflora petunia, with large crimson flowers decorated by a uniform white star pattern. It flowers early and has good recovery ability after stress. Try it with a blue salvia or a blue ageratum for a red, white and blue garden.

A NEW PRODUCT FOR HANGING BASKETS

Water-absorbing polymers were introduced into the greenhouse industry many years ago, and have shown some potential for outdoor plantings as well. The dry crystals are first hydrated and then added to soil mixes, where they store water for later use by plants. They are capable of holding up to 400 times their weight in water, and over 95% of it remains available to plant roots.

Think of the potential of such a product for outdoor hanging baskets! It could reduce your watering tasks by perhaps half. When you contract for hanging baskets this spring, discuss the water-absorbing polymers with your grower and recommend that they be used. You might try the gel crystals in half your baskets and containers, to make some comparisons under your own conditions.



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