



New varieties of daylilies bloom all season.

Sites need sun, drainage

In preparing a bed for perennials, remember that the plants can be left in place for several years. For this reason good site selection and soil preparation are extremely important.

► Select an area that provides at least morning sun and good drainage. Some species that like full sun in northern states will appreciate dappled afternoon shade when planted in the south.

► Avoid low places in the yard where water may stand after heavy rains.

► In poorly drained soils, plant on raised beds or incorporate a large amount of organic matter into the soil before planting, to improve drainage and aeration.

► A small amount of a balanced, slow-release fertilizer can be added if the soil nutrient level is poor.

H.S.S.

Southern perennials versatile, lasting

Throughout the south, herbaceous perennials are gaining in popularity faster than any other group of plants.

by H.S. STEVENS

Southern perennials add stability and continuity to the home or commercial landscape, and are among the most colorful, versatile and durable of all plants.

Due to their wide range of heights, textures, bloom times and colors, perennials are ideal for almost any purpose or effect. They can be used in massed plantings, mixed beds or borders or even as screening or background plants. Add in their durability and relatively low maintenance requirements and it is easy to see why perennials are playing an increasingly important role in the plans of homeowners and landscape professionals.

Plan your work

The best perennial beds start out on paper. Measure the area to be planted and draw it to scale. On another sheet, list the plants you want to grow. Now you're ready to arrange them in their proper places on your plan.

Consider mature size, color and texture combinations, bloom time and height. By selecting varieties that bloom at different times, you can have flowers throughout the entire season.

Ten that will thrive

When selecting specific perennials for

southern landscapes, there are many factors to consider. Between the eastern and western boundaries of what we call the South, there are wide variances in temperatures, rainfall and soil types, and each of these conditions must be taken into account when matching the plant to its proposed site. Fortunately, many of the best perennial plants are not too picky about their surroundings. With minimal care, they will thrive in any reasonable soil type, survive winter cold and summer heat, and still reward us with beautiful foliage and flowers. The ten perennials described below meet each of these criteria, and were chosen with input from Tom Brinda, vice-president of the Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Gardens, and Ruth Baumgardner, southeast regional director of the Perennial Plant Association and owner of Mouse Creek Nursery in Riceville, Tenn.

Bearded iris (*Iris* sp.). Irises were a mainstay in southern gardens when low maintenance gardening was a necessity instead of a philosophy. Their graceful beauty, dependability and easy care made them popular at a time when water was pumped from a well and pesticides were few in number and rarely used. These same qualities make irises popular today.



Hosta, 'Royal Standard'

Plant Association Plant of the Year for 1995. Silvery-gray aromatic foliage provides the background for masses of violet-blue flowers. Russian sage makes a striking specimen plant or mass display.

Zones 5 to 9; sun; height, 4 to 5 feet.

Purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*): Highly adaptable, easy to grow and

free-flowering, purple coneflowers will not only brighten the garden throughout late spring and summer, but are great for cutting or drying. White cultivars are also available.

Zones 3 to 9; sun to part sun; height, 24 to 30 inches.

Hostas: A fixture in northern landscapes for many years, hostas are now enjoying increased popularity in southern gardens. For shaded areas, they are among the most attractive and care-free plants we can grow. Hundreds of varieties are now available in a wide variety of sizes, shapes and colors. Some are ideal for use as low-care, shade-loving ground covers. Others make ideal borders for semi-shaded pathways or around shrubs and flower beds. Large growing varieties can be used as accent or specimen plants. Their uses are virtually unlimited. Check with local horticulturists for the best varieties for your area.

Zones 3 to 8; shade to semi-shade; height, 8 to 36 inches.

Louisiana iris: One of the few perennials that is tolerant of wet, poorly-drained soils, Louisiana iris can turn a low but sunny wet spot into a beautiful flower bed. Also adapted to drier soils, Louisiana iris are available in shades of red, yellow, purple and white.

Zones 4 to 9; sun to mostly sun; height, 24 inches.

Cannas: With cannas, new is definitely better. Im-

proved varieties, such as the 1992 All-America Selection 'Tropical Rose', are more compact and versatile than older types. Best used in a massed planting, cannas will provide non-stop color from late spring until fall frost. Available colors include red, pink and yellow.

Zones 7 to 11; sun to part sun; height, 2 to 6 feet, depending on variety.

Ornamental grasses: These provide year-round interest in any landscape. Grown both for their attractive foliage and unique feathery plumes, clumps of these grasses make outstanding accents or focal points in the landscape. *Cortaderia selloana* 'Pumila' and *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Gracilimus' are excellent cultivars with wide adaptability, but it is good to check with local growers for your area's best varieties.

Although hardiness of different species varies, most are hardy to zone 5; sun to part sun; height, 1 to 6 feet or more, depending on variety.

Many other southern perennials would fit southern gardens. Some, however, such as coreopsis, columbine, salvia and phlox, are more variety sensitive. When choosing species or specific cultivars for a particular locale, it is wise to check with your nearest cooperative extension office, plant society or other authoritative source for their recommendations.

H.S. Stevens is a former instructor for the Texas Agricultural Extension Service. He writes a weekly garden column for the Dallas Morning News. Photos by Bobbi Benson.



Mixed iris bed brightens this southern garden.

Tolerant of heat, cold and drought, irises provide unexcelled beauty both in the garden and as cut flowers.

Zones 3 to 9; sun to half-sun; height, 12 to 30 inches, depending on variety.

Daylily (*hemerocallis*): One of the easiest and most rewarding of all perennials, each plant can produce 50 or more blossoms. By choosing several different varieties, you can have non-stop color all summer long. Recently-developed hybrids are far superior to older varieties, and provide more and larger flowers, a longer bloom time and a wide selection of colors. Check with a local daylily society or grower for the best cultivars for your area.

Zones 4 to 9; full to part sun; height, 12 to 48 inches, depending on variety.

'Goldsturm' coneflower (*Rudbeckia fulgidaa sultantii* 'Goldsturm'): A tough, persistent perennial whose golden yellow blossoms will light up the landscape throughout the entire summer and fall. Beautiful in the garden or as long-lasting cut flowers.

Zones 4 to 9; full sun; height, 18 to 24 inches.

Yarrow (*Achillea* sp.): Attractive, fern-like foliage and masses of yellow, red or white flowers will delight you all summer long. The flowers are excellent as cut flowers or for drying. Coronation Gold and *Achillea* 'Anthea' are outstanding cultivars.

Zones 3 to 9; sun; height, 12 to 36 inches, depending on variety.

Russian sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*): Called one of the great garden plants of all time, Russian sage was selected as Perennial