

For a Perennial Rainbow

A former neighbor had a fine lawn, azaleas and other lovely shrubs and, at first glance, beautiful perennials; at second glance, very long-lasting flowers, week after week, year after year. Silk or plastic is one solution. However most of us struggle with deer and voles, drought and disease, to have color and fragrance and life in our gardens year around by planting perennials, those species that last at least two years.

Daylilies and Iris and Peonies are forever plants even though each has a limited season. By choosing early, midseason and late cultivars of these three you will have Iris or Daylilies for six weeks and Peonies until rain or heat shatters their beauty. A host of other perennials can be used to bridge the seasons so that by reading the small print you can have a garden for all seasons.

In their wonderful "Book of Lists", Bonnie Lee Appleton and Lois Trigg Chaplin have given the term "guerilla perennials" to those plants that hustle along to maturity. In our mobile population we sometimes move before the perennials we have planted become established, since some species need three or four years.

One of the 'quick-to-cover' shade perennials they list is variegated bishop's weed, *Aegopodium podagraria*. It can be invasive but it is a ground cover and that is usually the point of planting it in the first place. They also list for shade creeping Jenny, *Lysimachia*, ostrich fern, *Matteuccia*, and grape leaf anemone, *Anemone vitifolia*, and *Ajuga*. These are plants you see everywhere and they are everywhere because they have earned their popularity by surviving dependably! A caution: another *Lysimachia*, *L. clethroides*, the gooseneck loosestrife, is invasive. It prefers full sun and I have it in shade that gets deeper each year but that plant expands into any empty spot it finds. It is rather disarming when in late summer all the curved necks are headed the same direction, as if they were on a mission.

Equally familiar are the sun guerillas, yarrow, calico aster, leadwort, sunflower, obedient plant, moss phlox, and the loosestrife mentioned above. A good place for that might be the so-called hell strip between road and sidewalk...or since sidewalks are so rare, between any two parcels of pavement.

The only *Artemisia* on the sun list is 'Powis Castle', about the only lovely silver/grey foliated plant that doesn't mug out in the heat and humidity here. Somewhat slow to get established but increasingly popular as more and more hybrids enter the market is the *Echinacea*, the old-fashioned coneflower. There are dozens of newly fashioned cultivars of the native coneflower, with more promised. You can't go wrong planting the dependable natives. If you wish to feed the birds, these natives are designed for that and they flourish in garden or meadow, in sun and in well-drained but not rich soil.

A compact rose/red one is *E. purpurea* 'Kim's Knee-High' and a white flowered compact one is 'Kim's Mop Head'. There is a vivid orange one, 'Tiki Torch' and even a green one, 'Green Jewel', that has lime green petals around a darker green cone. Traditionally the petals of this favorite have been a rosy red but two new ones have more brilliance, 'Red Knee Hi' and 'Tomato Soup'.

Deep pink and fluffy is 'Pink Double Delight' and 'Total Attraction' has purple/pink flowers high above bright green foliage on black stems and reputed to be unusually long blooming. 'Coconut Lime' is as delicious as its name and 'Harvest Moon' has waxy yellow/gold petals. You see the coneflowers are now a rainbow!

Coreopsis is another flower that has become more sophisticated with all the attention showered on the original tickseed. 'Moonbeam' is not new but has the softer yellow than the

gold of the species with fine textured wiry foliage. *Coreopsis tripteris* is a tall, (seven foot) back-of-the-border plant with the same characteristics as the low-growing 'Moonbeam'. Not content with yellow, newer tickseeds are marked with maroon or red, such as 'Red-Shift' and 'Siena Sunset'. For beauty summer after summer, select those perennials that have natives in their ancestry. They will become the mainstays of your garden.

A NOTE: Coming Sunday: Earth Hour! You are thinking, but isn't that in April? Earth Day is Wednesday, April 22 but this Sunday evening is Earth Hour. Last year 36 million Americans and millions of others world wide turned out their lights for 60 minutes. You may not have been aware of it unless you track the internet but people, young people especially, are not waiting for instructions from on high, but are demanding solutions to the problems created by climate change. Check it out: earthhourus.org.