

Perennial Planning

In a city I where I formerly lived, there was a particular home with a landscape that I absolutely enjoyed. It had lots of trees, secluded areas where a child could get lost in play for hours saving princesses or fighting pretend battles with the enemy. Rustic statues were strategically placed along with rock walls dividing areas reminiscent of the English countryside. During the spring, the yard was especially beautiful due to amazing ornamental landscape beds full of wonderful perennial spring flowering plants. In my opinion, the yard could have been featured in any landscape magazine. The yard was fit to host weddings for the most beautiful and deserving brides. However, after the spring season was over, the yard, although still very ornamental, lacked the same pizzazz, due to the lack of plants that add interest during the fall and summer.

The reason for the lack of summer and fall color was that the homeowners most likely had purchased the perennial plants in the spring. Perennials available for purchase at this time of year generally only bloom in the spring and early summer. Conversely, perennials available in the summer and fall more commonly bloom during those times. To have perennial flower color throughout the growing season likely will require trips to the garden center during different times of the year.

A trip to the garden center after the spring season can be a good thing. In the spring, most want to purchase plants to spruce up the yard and get it all done at once, but this is also the time when gardeners will likely get less help from garden center employees due to the large volume of customers. Later in the year, garden centers are less busy and many still have a wonderful selection of plants.

Many inexpensive books on adding color to the landscape are available. USU Extension is also an excellent resource. A fact sheet entitled Seasonal Splendor (planting for color) can be accessed at http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/Horticulture_Home_2008-01pr.pdf. It features many plants that will add interest to the landscape throughout the growing season. Your local USU Extension agriculture or horticulture agent will be happy to answer planting questions.

Specific plants with excellent summer or fall flowers include various cone flowers, black eyed Susans, hyssops or hummingbird mints, fall blooming anemones, asters, chrysanthemums, clematis, gaura, many upright sedums, various coreopsis, pincushion flowers and rose of Sharon shrub. Alternatively, many grasses and woody plants offer summer and fall interest and should not be ignored in favor of flowering plants. Some worth considering include perennial fountain grasses, miscanthus varieties, Shenandoah switchgrass and various varieties of feather reed grass. Many others exist.

Woody plants that deserve consideration include golden rain tree, American and European smoketrees, sumac, various serviceberries, barberries and cotoneasters.