

Easy Plants for a Beautiful, Low-Maintenance Yard

One of the questions I am asked most often is, "What plants grow well in Utah with relatively little care?" Over the years, I have developed a list of trees, shrubs, and perennials that consistently perform well in home landscapes. While no landscape plant is completely maintenance-free, these selections are attractive, well-adapted to Utah conditions, and generally require minimal care once established and properly irrigated.

Trees

For smaller yards, trees that mature at 20 feet or less are often the best choice. Among the easiest are **Spring Snow crabapples**, which produce beautiful spring flowers but no fruit, making them exceptionally clean. Other excellent clean crabapple cultivars include **Raspberry Spear**, **Merilee**, **Prairie Fire**, and **Royal Raindrops**. Additional small trees that are attractive and dependable include tree-form serviceberries such as **Autumn Brilliance** and compact zelkovas including **City Sprite** and **Wireless**.

If you have room for a medium or large shade tree, consider **Queen Elizabeth maple**, **State Street maple**, **sycamore maple** (which is actually a maple species), hybrid elms (not to be confused with the invasive Siberian elm), larger zelkovas such as **Green Vase** and **Village Green**, and white oaks including **American white oak**, **English oak**, **bur oak**, and **swamp white oak**.

Shrubs

Many shrubs thrive in Utah with little maintenance. For smaller spaces, consider dwarf ninebarks, which feature attractive burgundy or golden foliage. **Lodense privet** performs well in full sun and can be clipped into a formal hedge much like boxwood. Dwarf barberries such as **Crimson Pygmy**, **Sunjoy Mini Maroon**, **Sunjoy Saffron**, and **Rose Glow** provide colorful foliage throughout the growing season. Dwarf **rose-of-Sharon** varieties bloom from midsummer until frost, although they still reach about 5 to 6 feet if left unpruned.

For larger shrubs, **lilacs** remain one of the best choices, offering decades of dependable spring blooms with relatively little maintenance. **Cheyenne** and **Golden privets** make excellent hedges. The many cultivars of **rose-of-Sharon** provide colorful flowers that vary from white and pink to purple depending on the variety during the latter half of summer, while **butterfly bush** blooms for much of the season. If you need a narrow hedge, **Tallhedge buckthorn** and **Fine Line buckthorn** stay only about 2 to 3 feet wide.

In shaded locations, **English laurel**, **Emerald 'n Gold euonymus**, and **Emerald Gaiety euonymus** provide dependable evergreen color. Deciduous shrubs that tolerate shade include **alpine currant** and **snowberry**.

Perennials

Among the easiest long-blooming perennials are **Stella de Oro daylily**—and, for that matter, nearly any daylily. Other excellent performers include **Gaura (whirling butterflies)**, **compact catmints**, **yellow and orange coreopsis** (red cultivars tend to be shorter lived), **hummingbird mint (Agastache)**, **coneflowers**, **black-eyed Susans**, and **hybrid perennial hibiscus**.

One of my personal favorites is the upright, fall-blooming **stonecrop (Sedum)**. These succulent plants are extremely water-wise once established, feature attractive green to burgundy foliage, and produce clusters of pink to deep red flowers in late summer and fall.

For shade gardens, attractive foliage often becomes more important than long bloom periods. **Heuchera (coral bells)** offers colorful leaves in shades of green, yellow, orange, red, and burgundy. Its close relative, **Tiarella (foam flower)**, is another excellent choice. Other dependable shade perennials include **hostas**, **columbines**, **perennial geraniums**, **leopard's bane**, **variegated brunneras** such as **Jack Frost**, and **Japanese anemones**, which provide welcome blooms in late summer and fall when many other perennials have finished flowering.

Although these plants require relatively little maintenance once established, they still need proper planting, regular irrigation during establishment, and occasional pruning or cleanup. Give them the care they need during their first few seasons, and they will reward you with years of beauty while requiring far less work than many other landscape plants.