

A Plethora of Perennials

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"What perennials should I be using more?" I don't feel that the question is without merit. With so many good plants available, and more introduced each year, it's very difficult for the designer to keep up with the best plants currently available. It is hard to narrow down even just my personal list of favorites, but for the sake of brevity, I'll discuss only a few.

SUN - Repeat bloom - Exceptional color - Long blooming - Groundcover

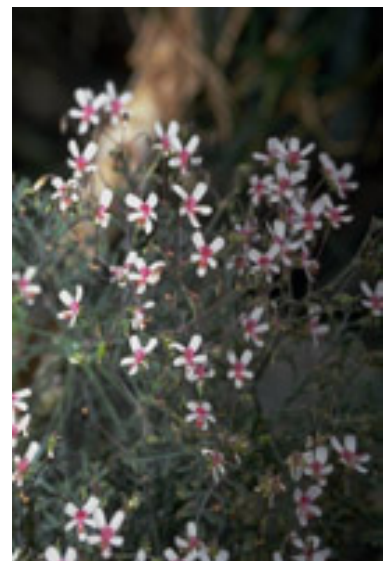
Possibilities:

For those who like Shasta Daisies, but object to the short blooming time and bad summer foliage, there is now a variety, Chrysanthemum (now Leucanthemum) 'Summer Snowball', a Blooms of Bressingham introduction, that has fully double white daisies in May and June, with repeat bloom later in September and October. The foliage remains clean all season. *Delospermum* is a genus of South African succulents, most of which are hardy in our area. *D. cooperi* forms evergreen mats of green succulent foliage which carry masses of purple daisy-like flowers all summer. *D. nubigenum* has shorter, fatter foliage which is apple-green in summer and reddish in winter. It bears yellow daisies from spring into summer.

The genus *Dianthus* offers many species and cultivars of interest to the landscaper. Two of the best are Cheddar Pinks. 'Firewitch' sports fragrant single magenta flowers on 6" stems all summer. 'Morning Mist' has smoky pink blooms above mats of silvery blue foliage that rival *Festuca* 'Elijah Blue' for exceptional color all year. Even if it never bloomed, 'Morning Mist' would be outstanding in the border as a foliage plant.

For large, impressive masses of native plants, nothing can rival the *Eupatoriums*. Our native Joe Pye Weed had to be taken to Europe and developed, only to be returned to us as a worthy garden plant. Both *E. fistulosum* 'Selection' and *E. maculatum* 'Gateway' sport large heads of pinkish flowers on wine-colored stems. *E. rugosum* 'Chocolate' has clusters of white flowers above chocolate-purple leaves on purple stems.

For a profusion of bloom over an extended period, few plants can outperform the *Gauras* (image to the right). From low mounds of lance-shaped green leaves explode dozens of wiry stems of pink-budded, white flowers all summer. Cultivar 'Whirling Butterflies' is aptly named, as its blossoms resemble a swarm of small white butterflies gently carried to and fro on the slightest breeze. 'Corrie's Gold' is similar, with a golden edge to every leaf. In addition, each blossom



fades to a pleasing pink. Both varieties provide a delicate addition to either the front or middle of a planting bed.

For yellow color in the late summer and fall there are the Goldenrods. *Solidago* '**Golden Fleece**' sports heart-shaped, semi-evergreen leaves and 18" wands of golden yellow flowers from August to October. *S.* '**Fireworks**' forms a 3-4' clump of rich green foliage topped by an explosion of golden streamers in late summer.

For versatility, it's hard to compete with the *Veronicas*. There are carpeting varieties, such as *V. repens*, with evergreen leaves barely ¼ inch high covered in spring with light blue flowers. Groundcover varieties include '**Goodness Grows**' and *V. alpina* '**Alba**', which have 10-12" spikes of purple and white flowers respectively. Perhaps my favorite is *V. penduncularis* '**Georgia Blue**', a non-spiking variety which explodes with masses of china blue flowers all spring. It's a great ground cover for spring bulbs, especially the smaller daffodils, and is evergreen, becoming bronze-colored for the entire winter. Who could ask more of a groundcover?

SHADE - All summer - Versatility - More than foliage

Possibilities:

There are as many exceptional plant choices for shade as for sun, but most of these options are often overlooked in landscape designs. While Hostas, Ferns and Astilbes are often used, many other worthy plants are neglected. For clients that love the deep blue color of Delphiniums, in part-shade and late summer we can offer **Monkshoods**. With dissected, deep green foliage, they offer a range of flower color from white to yellow to pink, blue and purple. These hooded flowers bloom on spikes stronger than any Delphinium and can, depending on species, extend the season from weeks to months.

Everyone is familiar with the Bleeding Heart, the beauty that blooms in spring and then goes dormant in the heat of summer. But the genus *Dicentra* offers more than fleeting spring beauty. The *formosa* and *eximia* hybrids have more dissected foliage and smaller flowers, but are strong enough to flourish and bloom throughout the summer. '**Luxuriant**' sports pink flowers all summer, while '**Langtree's**' produces icy white blooms for almost as long.

Hardy *Geraniums* are probably the most under-used plants in proportion to their versatility of any perennial. Most are at home in any situation from full sun to shade and come in colors from white to pink to magenta to purple-blue. They can tolerate damp locations, as well as fairly dry ones. The *sanguineum* types form sprawling mats of palmate foliage with white, pink, or magenta flowers. The *cantabrigiense* family ('**Biokovo**', '**Karmina**', '**Cambridge**') sport glossy evergreen foliage that turns reddish-orange to red-purple in winter. Flower colors range from light to deep pink. My favorite Geraniums are the 'Big Root', or *macrorrhizum* types. '**Ingwersen's Variety**' has pale pink blooms, while '**Bevan's Variety**' is magenta, and '**Album**', of course, is white. All these have large, fuzzy palmate leaves which take on a beautiful reddish-purple fall and winter color.

Hellebores should be used more often in the shady landscape. All have large, glossy, leathery, fingered foliage, and bloom from late winter into spring in colors ranging from white to cream, pink to red to

purple. *Helleborus niger*, the "Christmas Rose, has greenish-white flowers and blooms from December into January. *H. orientalis* and its hybrids, the "Lenten Rose", comes in many shades, both spotted and clear, and can be found blooming in late winter. *H. foetidus*, the "Stinking Hellebore", sports clusters of green flowers, while the "Corsican Hellebore", *H. argutifolius* is a flower arranger's dream, with coarsely-toothed, gray-green leaves and greenish flowers.

Besides the ferns and hostas, we ought to consider *Ligularias*. With their large, heart-shaped leaves and golden yellow flowers, they add interest that mere foliage plants cannot. 'Desdemona' has deep bronze-green leaves on purple stems, and sports clusters of orange-yellow daisies. 'The Rocket' has toothed green leaves on narrow stems and carries spikes of brown-centered golden flowers in late summer.

Tiarellas make interesting groundcovers for shade, with their varied leaf shapes and color patterns. Some of the best are *T. wherryi*, *T. 'Slickrock'*, 'Running Tapestry', and 'Oakleaf'. Crosses between *Tiarella* and *Heuchera* (Coral Bells) have produced several interesting forms, including 'Pink Frost' and 'Bridget Bloom'

For late summer and fall, consider the family of *Tricyrtis*. These fall "orchids" have arching stems of green or spotted leaves with flowers appearing in the leaf axils, Flowers, which can be white, yellow, or spotted with blue or purple, do resemble orchids and are heavily produced on all forms.

Time and space do not permit further examination of the many worthy perennials available today. As can be seen from the examples above, the choices are extensive. All one needs to do is to investigate the possibilities.