

Garden design solutions: perennial champions



By Ian McBain

A well-designed garden will feature a pleasing blend of different types of plants. We've got trees to provide height, structure and shade. Shrubs serve as the backbone of our

gardens, offering texture, volume and seasonal interest. Ornamental grasses give us movement and textural contrast, while bulbs can provide welcome colour and cheer at key times of the year.

But of all of our different types of plants, it is our perennials that most often catch our attention during late spring and early summer. Perennials are plants which grow and flower in the spring, die back during the autumn and winter, and then reappear the following spring. They give us extraordinary seasonal interest and no garden should be without them.

Here are seven of my favourite perennials:

1. Geranium: perennial geraniums provide long-lasting flowers and excellent groundcover. With textural foliage and simple blooms, they really are a 'must-have'. Geranium 'Rozanne' (blue/purple flowers) and Geranium 'Wargrave Pink' are the two I use most frequently, but I am also fond of some of the white flowering varieties.

2. Alchemilla: another wonderful groundcover perennial, Alchemillas, have distinctive mid-green foliage and an abundance of long-lasting soft yellow flowers. Happy in sun and shade, Alchemilla mollis is my go-to perennial to provide cohesion across a planting plan.

3. Salvia: perfect for long-lasting colour and interest, perennial Salvias can provide height and texture. Salvia 'Caradonna' and Salvia x superba both have dark blue/purple flowers, and can flower from late May through to early autumn.

4. Heuchera: with large leaves and dainty flowers, Heucheras are a useful addition to any garden. There are lots of different options, but I like the purple-leaved varieties (especially Heuchera 'Palace Purple') for adding a pop of colourful contrast.



5. Foeniculum: fennel is an edible plant, but it can also be used as a striking ornamental perennial. Foeniculum 'Purpureum' is a bronze fennel and provides height and gloriously soft feathery foliage. A profusion of yellow flowers (much loved by bees) is an added bonus, as is the delicious aniseed fragrance of the leaves and stems.

6. Geum: an often underrated family of plants in my opinion, Geums give us colour and wonderful interest. Geum 'Mrs Bradshaw' is a particular favourite, with bright scarlet flowers on 20-30cm long stems. The flowers' golden centres give an extra splash of colour.

7. Verbena: much loved by butterflies, Verbenas are great for giving height and colour to a mixed planting scheme. Verbena bonariensis is simply beautiful, with long, tall stems and clusters of tiny neon-purple flowers. I like to let it seed itself through a border for maximum interest.

This is just a very small selection of some of the perennials I like to use when I am designing a planting plan for my customers. With the right mix of perennials we can have colour and interest in our gardens from early spring right through to late autumn.

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