



Low Maintenance Perennials Dawn Tack

There were no gardens when I moved into my present location in, Donwood, twelve years ago. The acre property is now more gardens than grass. Over the past seven years I have become more conscious about the use of water. I also wanted to enjoy the gardens, and not just work in them. I found that many perennials are easier to grow and more drought tolerant than others and this made me change what I grow. My gardens are display gardens for my customers, and it is important that they look good. If you take the time to plan and do a bit of preparation, you can achieve great looking gardens with low maintenance perennials as well.

The first thing to do is to prepare the garden well. You need to amend the soil by working in compost.

The second thing to do is to take some time to observe where the sun and shade are in your garden. Proper plant selection for the light conditions is important in making a plant thrive in its new home. Keep in mind that not all sun is created equal. It is easy to say that Hosta do not like the the sun. However, if it is sunny only until mid day, this makes a huge difference.

If your garden faces north or is under a tree you should usually look for shade plants. If the garden faces south or west without any obstructions you will need plants for full sun. Plants for part shade are used for those areas facing east or with filtering obstructions. Plant tags often list a range of light requirements such as “shade to part shade”.

Now comes the fun part - shopping for your new plants. It is best to stay away from plants that are invasive. If you stick with the clumping types of perennials you do not need to worry about them getting out of control.

Climate hardiness is another key to success. In the Peterborough, we are Canadian zone 5B. So you can grow anything in a zone 5 or lower. Purchasing higher than 5 means you risk that it will not come back after a severe winter.

I strongly suggest that if you are new to gardening, you shop where you can ask knowledgeable staff for advice. You can bring with you measurements of your new garden and jot down the the direction of north along with the approximate location of your house, other structures and trees.

In Peterborough, you can add new plants to your garden usually from early May to mid September. Since August is usually hot and dry, I would suggest only weeding at that time and watering if needed. It is also better to plant early in the morning or later in the day.

When you do plant, you should mix the potting soil with your garden soil. It is usually quite airy and nice to blend with the soil from the garden. I recommend digging the hole twice the size of the pot and knock off some of the potting soil from the plant since the roots can take it. Then build up a hill of the hole. Spread the roots out – fill the hole up with mixed dirt and water well.

Mulch will keep the weeds out and moisture in but put it down after a good rain since, in the beginning, it does take some of the moisture away from the plants.

Water deeply once a week when there is no rain for the first season. I choose low maintenance perennials that are also drought tolerant so I only have to do this regular watering for the first season. Keep in mind if you let the plant be dry between watering the roots become very healthy since they grow looking for the water. You might think that the health of a plant depends on what you see above the soil, but the roots are just as important.

Here are some perennials I have had great success with growing with little or no fussing.

Full Sun

Siberian Iris, Coneflowers (varieties like 'Rubins Glow', 'Green Envy', 'Coconut Lime', 'Harvest Moon', 'Double Decker' and 'Double Pink Delight'), Sedums (easiest are 'Frosty Morn', 'Matrona', 'Autumn Delight', 'Sebodii', 'Black Jack' and 'Vera Jamison'), grasses (non-invasive varieties like 'Blue Oats', 'Bulbous Oat Grass', 'Karl Foerster Grass' and new 'Huron Sunset'), Daylilies (Longest blooming – Stella d' oro, Next longest 'Little Wine Cup'. Nicely scented 'Lemon Lily', 'Double Dream' andgreat eyes 'Custard Candy', 'Fooled Me' 'Mardi Gras Parade', 'Daring Deception' great doubles 'Cute Thing' 'Vanilla Fluff' and 'Fanciful Finery' Fancy new ones 'Destine to See', 'Lavender Stardust' 'Spiritual Corridor' and 'Advanced Party'), Coreopsis (varieties like 'Moonbeam', new 'Full Moon' and 'Jethro Tall')
Flax, and do not forget bulbs this fall to add more spring interest.

Part Shade

Hosta all shapes, colour etc Some of my favorites; 'Dance with Me', 'Center of Attention', 'Touch of Class', 'Niagara Falls', 'Whirlwind', 'Sum it Up', 'Heat Wave', 'Halcyon' & 'Sum and Substance'. The Hosta of the year for 2008 'Little Mouse Ears' Bleeding Heart like 'Luxiernt' and 'Gold Heart' with its gold foliage and contrasting pink blooms.

Bugloss like 'Jack Frost' great forget me not like blue flowers in the spring, 'Heuchera' with great foliage colours like Lime, Carmel, Black, Burgundy and many more combos. Solemn Seal creates a great arching back drop. Lungworts also bloom early and leave you with great foliage all season long.

Hardy Geraniums So great this years perennial of the year is 'Rozanne' and blooms all season. Others include 'Var. Striatum', 'Cambridge' and 'Biokovo'.

I wish you a happy gardening season. If you'd like to learn more feel free to join me in my 2nd workshop this season covering 'My top Low Maintenance Perennials and Why' Jun 14 9am.

All proceeds donated to Breast Cancer. Register 742-5918.

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