

## The Best Perennials for Area Gardens

*(listed by bloom time, January through December)*

### Qualifications

- must be well adapted to our climate and able to:
  - withstand our summer heat and humidity
  - survive our winter temperatures, as well as potentially winter-wet soil
  - tolerate the occasional drought, or flood
- must not be especially prone to diseases or insects
- must not be invasive ("*vigorous*" is OK)
- must be easy to grow, low maintenance, and have good success for most gardeners
- should either have a long bloom time (or be spectacular when it does bloom), have attractive foliage, or have multi-season interest

### The Plants

#### *Helleborus* species and hybrids – Hellebore

- many different species, most of which are Eurasian in origin; my favorite is *H. orientalis* (Lenten Rose) and its hybrids.
- many different color choices; blooms in winter; evergreen foliage
- prefers partial to near full shade in any soil but wet soil
- 12-15" tall and wide; resistant to deer, insects, disease, and drought
- *H. foetidus* (Reeking or Bear's Foot Hellebore) is a great naturalizer; many exciting new hybrids are available as well

#### *Veronica umbrosa* 'Georgia Blue' – Georgia Blue Speedwell

- native to the Republic of Georgia; pure blue flowers in late winter; evergreen foliage reddens in winter

- 1” tall; spreading groundcover
- full sun in moist well-drained soil; deer and rabbit resistant

### *Sedum rupestre* ‘Angelina’ – Angelina Stonecrop

- there are many, many sedums available to the gardening public; most are non-native; there are upright and spreading varieties; evergreen or deciduous; if I had to pick one it would be ‘Angelina’
- evergreen foliage is bright yellow/lime green in summer and turns orangey gold in the late fall and winter
- 3-4” tall with a spreading habit
- full sun in well-drained soil; drought tolerant; mammal resistant

### *Epimedium* species and hybrids – Barrenwort

- this is a large group of garden-worthy Asian plants that have several things in common; delicate and unusual early spring flowers, groundcover-like attractive foliage, and the ability to tolerate dry shade
- low growing to 6-12” tall depending on variety with a spreading habit
- part to full shade in moist well-drained soil; drought tolerant

### *Phlox subulata* – Creeping Phlox, Moss Pink

- Virginia native; early spring blooms are pink, white, red, or blue; evergreen foliage
- 2-6” tall, low mat forming groundcover or edger
- full sun in well-drained soil; drought tolerant

### *Iris germanica* and hybrids – Bearded Iris

- probably the most popular of irises, and with the widest variety of cultivars available; typically spring blooming, but there are several that reliably re-bloom in fall; although bloom time is not long, attractive foliage is an asset

- size varies by selection
- full sun in normal well-drained to dry soil; deer resistant

### *Iris x louisiana* – Louisiana Iris

- a hybrid group developed from several U.S. natives; very showy flowers in multiple colors; blooms in spring
- prefers consistently moist to wet soils in full sun; summer dormant foliage is more attractive in wet soils; not drought tolerant; deer resistant

### *Iris siberica* – Siberian Iris

- spring blooming Eurasian iris; multiple colors available
- very attractive grass-like foliage lends landscape interest through fall
- full sun in well-drained soil; keep moist during establishment phase, thereafter drought tolerant; deer resistant

### *Polygonatum odoratum* ‘Variegatum’ – Variegated Solomon’s Seal

- Asian native; grown primarily for its fantastic green and white foliage; small white flowers in spring
- 18-24” tall; spreads moderately; long-lived
- full to partial shade in moist well-drained soil

### *Baptisia australis* and hybrids – False Indigo

- this member of the legume family is one of our toughest native perennials, and as an old boss of mine frequently said “a no-brainer”
- large clusters of pea-like flowers rise above attractive blue-green foliage in May; flower colors are typically in the blue to purple range, but yellow, white, pink, and burgundy selections are available; attractive to butterflies and hummingbirds; handsome charcoal gray seed pods
- full sun in soil with good drainage, drought resistant, mammal resistant, resents being moved

- grows slowly to 3' tall and wide
- numerous cultivars available

### *Bletilla striata* – Chinese Ground Orchid

- terrestrial orchid with exotic pink flowers in spring; several cultivars available, some with other flower colors; attractive pleated sword-like foliage
- prefers light shade in moist well-drained soil, too much shade and flowers will be sparse
- 1.5' tall by slightly less in width; slow; if happy it will naturalize

### *Amorphophallus konjac* – Konjac Voodoo Lily

- this is one to make the neighbors talk
- on established plants the flower stalk emerges in late April/early May before the foliage, and can reach 3-4' tall; a spikey dark burgundy and ivory spadix is surrounded by dark burgundy spathe; this plant is pollinated by flies, and to lure them in, the whole thing smells (and looks like) rotting meat
- the flower only lasts a couple of weeks, then collapses and disappears; 1-2 months later the non-fragrant foliage appears and will last until early fall, reaching 2-2.5'; lends an exotic look to the garden, and the stalk is a variegated fleshy pink and green
- the corm from which this grows is used in weight loss products and the plant has a long medicinal history in its native Asia
- prefers light shade with even moisture, but can take the occasional drought

### *Kniphofia* species and hybrids – Red Hot Poker

- native to South Africa; dramatic poker-like flower stalks, usually has flowers in the orange, red, and yellow ranges; older varieties bloom in mid-spring to early summer; several new varieties rebloom

throughout the summer (Eco and Popsicle series); attracts hummingbirds; attractive grass-like foliage

- can get up to 4-5' tall, but dwarf selections are available
- full sun in well-drained soil; drought tolerant once established
- seek out *K. sarmentosa* for unusual late fall flowers

### *Begonia grandis* – Hardy Begonia

- this Asian native has attractive foliage reminiscent of angel or dragon wing begonias, only this species is hardy in Tidewater
- pink flowers bloom from early summer until fall
- 18-24" tall and wide
- prefers partial shade in moist well drained soil; if happy, naturalizes by bulblets

### *Stokesia laevis* – Stokes' Aster

- southeastern native; showy pale blue flowers in late spring to early summer; other colors available; attracts butterflies; semi-evergreen foliage
- grows 1-2 tall and wide
- full sun in moist well-drained soil; drought tolerant; not tolerant of winter wet; rabbit resistant
- two good cultivars are 'Peachies's Pick' and 'Colorwheel'

### *Delosperma cooperi* – Ice Plant

- this South African native has attractive, fleshy, succulent foliage and brilliant fuchsia-purple flowers; blooms off and on early summer to early fall; attractive to butterflies
- only grows 2-4" tall by 2' wide, like a throw rug
- full sun in dry well-drained soil; very drought tolerant; deer resistant
- many ice plants are on the market, but I have found this to be the most reliable bloomer

### Hemerocallis – Daylily

- what's not to love
- numerous colors; easy to grow; divides easily
- full to partial sun; adaptable to adverse conditions, but responds well to TLC
- size varies by cultivar

### Coreopsis verticillata 'Zagreb' – Zagreb Coreopsis/Tickseed

- probably the best cultivar of a Virginia native; blooms in early summer through early fall with bright yellow daisy-like flowers; better if kept deadheaded or shear after first flowering; attracts butterflies; attractive fern-like foliage
- 12-18" tall and wide
- prefers full to partial sun in well-drained soil; somewhat drought tolerant
- there are numerous *Coreopsis* cultivars, but not all of them are long-lived; 'Zagreb' was in the top, but 'Summer Sunshine' was the best from the Mt. Cuba trials

### Leucanthemum × superbum 'Becky' – Becky Daisy

- of all the daisies available this is probably the best; large white flowers surround golden centers; blooms early summer to fall, especially if deadheaded; attracts butterflies
- at 3-4' tall it is one of the larger daisies, but does not need staking
- full to part sun in well-drained soil; drought tolerant once established; deer and rabbit resistant

### Salvia guaranitica 'Black and Blue' – Black and Blue Anise-scented Sage

- South American native with deep blue flowers and black calyces; blooms from June to frost; attractive to bees and hummingbirds
- grows 2-5' tall and wide with a spreading habit

- full to partial sun in moist well-drained soil; drought tolerant once established; deer resistant

### Salvia uliginosa – Bog Sage

- South American native with bright, sky-blue and white flowers; blooms June through fall; attractive to bees, butterflies, hummingbirds
- can get 4-5' tall and wide with a spreading wispy habit
- does best in light shade, but can tolerate sun with adequate moisture; prefers evenly moist soil, but can take wet or dry as well

### Eucomis species and hybrids – Pineapple Lily

- native to South Africa, these plants have found their way into local gardens
- they get their common name from the flower, which does indeed resemble a pineapple; blooms in summer
- strap-like foliage is just as attractive as the flowers; several selections have striking red to burgundy coloration
- full sun to light shade in moist well drained soil
- size varies by cultivar, but can be anywhere from 12-30" tall and wide

### Zephyranthes species and hybrids – Rain Lily

- multiple species native to the warmer parts of North and South America; lily-like flowers are typically in the white, pink, or yellow range; blooms from June to September, especially after periods of rain; attracts butterflies; grass-like foliage
- 6-12" tall depending on selection
- full to partial sun; spreads easily by bulbs

### *Echinacea purpurea* – Purple Coneflower

- common North American native; despite its name the flowers are typically pink with a prominent central cone; attractive to butterflies
- blooms from June until early fall, more so if deadheaded, but leaving spent blossoms provides food for birds, and will help it naturalize
- species can grow 2-4' tall, but size varies among cultivars
- prefers full to part sun in well-drained soil; drought tolerant, and deer resistant
- seems to be a never ending conveyor belt of new cultivars, but I have found the straight species, 'Magnus', 'Kim's Knee High', and 'White Swan' to be the most reliable

### *Crinum* hybrids – Crinum Lily

- a long-lived Southern favorite with handsome strap-like foliage; gorgeous fragrant flowers bloom off and on through the summer; remove spent flower stalk to encourage rebloom; flowers can be white, pink, red, or combinations; native to tropics and subtropics worldwide; check zone prior to purchase
- large underground bulbs
- full sun to partial shade, tolerant of a wide range of soil types
- size varies by selection, and there are many species and hybrids to choose from

### *Rudbeckia fulgida* var. *sullivantii* 'Goldsturm' – Goldsturm Black-eyed Susan

- Rudbeckia is one of North America's most prolific wildflowers; several species native to Virginia; 'Goldsturm' is one of the best cultivars for both home and commercial landscapes
- blooms all summer with golden yellow flowers and black eyes; attractive to butterflies; deadheading promotes more blooms, but the seedheads are a source of food for birds



- full sun in well-drained soil; drought tolerant once established; deer resistant; easy to grow, and can spread vigorously

### *Rudbeckia maxima* – Large Coneflower, Cabbage Leaf Coneflower

- very tall golden yellow flowers with dark brown cones on 5-7' stalks; blooms in early to mid-summer; attracts butterflies; very attractive blue-green basal foliage, 2-3' tall and wide
- prefers full sun in moist soil, but can be drought tolerant once established; deer and rabbit resistant
- other worthy species include *R. lacinata*, *R. nitida*, *R. triloba* (*reseeding biennial*)

### *Lantana camara* 'Miss Huff' – Miss Huff Lantana

- one of my favorite perennials; native to the tropics, but this is the most reliable and the easiest to find of all the purportedly hardy lantanas
- covered in orange/yellow flowers from June until mid-fall; attracts butterflies
- grows large at 4-5' tall and wide, or more
- full sun in well-drained soil; drought tolerant
- *L. montevidensis* has been hardy at NBG for years; purple flowers with low spreading habit

### *Phlox paniculata* – Garden Phlox

- Virginia native; several color selections; blooms mid-summer into fall; attractive to butterflies and hummingbirds
- grows 2-4' tall, but smaller selections are available
- full to partial sun in moist well drained soil; not drought tolerant; needs good air circulation
- only plant mildew resistant varieties such as 'Blue Paradise', 'David', 'Robert Poore', 'Shortwood', and several others

### *Chelone lyonii* – Turtlehead

- Virginia native with pink flowers blooming summer into fall
- prefers partial shade in moist to wet soil
- 1.5-2' tall by slightly less in width, can spread if happy
- 'Hot Lips' is the most commonly available cultivar; *C. glabra* is a white flowering species

### *Musa basjoo* – Hardy Fiber Banana

- Chinese native grown primarily for its foliage which lends a tropical look to the garden; rarely flowers and no fruits in this climate; the hardiest banana, no winter protection needed
- can get reach 10' tall or more
- full sun to partial shade; does best in consistently moist soil

### *Tradescantia pallida* 'Purpurea' – Purple Heart

- surprisingly hardy Mexican native is often sold as an annual; grown primarily for its handsome purple foliage; pale pink flowers in late summer-fall
- 8-10" tall by 1.5-2' wide with a groundcover-like habit
- full to partial sun in moist well-drained soil; moderately drought tolerant

### *Agastache* 'Blue Fortune' – Blue Fortune Anise Hyssop

- many different *Agastache* species, but this hybrid between a U.S. and a Korean species is one of the best
- 4" lavender-blue, bottlebrush flowers bloom for several months beginning in early July on top of 3' tall stems
- aromatic foliage and flowers have a pleasant licorice scent
- extremely attractive to butterflies, bees, and other pollinators, but not to mammals, including deer
- 2-3' tall by 1.5-2' wide
- full sun, drought tolerant, will not tolerate poorly drained soil

### *Ruellia brittoniana* – Mexican Petunia

- numerous purple flowers mid-summer to fall; attractive dark foliage has a blue cast when grown in full sun
- grows 3-4' tall; skinny but easily forms large colonies; may need to be kept in check; invasive in Florida
- full sun to light shade; thrives in moist to wet soil, but is drought tolerant as well

### *Tulbaghia violacea* – Society Garlic

- South African native that gets its common name from the pungent garlic-like fragrance of its foliage; flower stalks rise above foliage and hold clusters of small lilac colored blossoms; blooms mid-summer to early fall
- 1-2 tall; spreads by tuberous roots
- full to partial sun in moist well drained soil; drought tolerant; deer and rabbit resistant

### *Pycnanthemum muticum* – Short-toothed Mountain Mint

- Virginia native with pale pink flower clusters July – September; attractive silver foliage; a pollinator magnet.
- Grows 1-3' tall with a vigorous spreading habit; may need to be managed unless you want it to naturalize
- full sun to part shade in moist well-drained soil; drought tolerant;

### *Hibiscus moscheutos* and hybrids – Hardy Hibiscus

- *H. moscheutos* is a Va. native, and the other species used in hybridization are U.S. natives
- enormous blooms, mid to late summer, can be red, white, pink, or combinations; attractive to butterflies; some newer varieties have attractive burgundy colored foliage

- size varies by species and cultivar, but many are large, some are compact
- full sun in medium to wet soils; not drought tolerant; some localized insect issues

### *Lobelia cardinalis* – Cardinal Flower

- one of Virginia's prettiest native perennials with bright red flowers in mid to late summer; attracts hummingbirds and butterflies
- 2-4' tall with an upright habit
- full to partial sun in consistently moist soil; plants in more sun need more water; not drought tolerant; not long-lived but reseeds

### *Eutrochium* species – Joe Pye Weed

- these tall, robust, Virginia natives have huge mauve flowerheads that are an important food source for butterflies and other pollinators; blooms in late summer
- *E. fistulosum* and *E. purpureum* both grow very tall at 5-7', while *E. dubium* and several dwarf cultivars are smaller at 3-4'
- prefers full sun to part shade in moist to wet soils; spreads quickly and shouldn't be ignored

### *Kalimeris pinnatifida* – Japanese Aster

- profuse billowy clouds of chrysanthemum-like flowers; double white blooms with pale yellow centers bloom July to September; attracts butterflies; not really an aster
- grows 2-3' with a slow spreading habit
- full to partial sun in moist well-drained soil; easy perennial for beginners

### *Hedychium* species – Hardy Ginger

- native to tropical Asia, the most commonly available species of this plant is *H. coronarium*, or butterfly ginger; it has intensely fragrant

white flowers in late summer; other varieties offer different colors, usually in the yellow to orange range with equal to no fragrance depending on the selection; all have attractive tropical foliage, and some can produce attractive seed pods

- prefers full to part sun in moist soil
- typically a large plant reaching 4-6' tall depending on variety, can get wide too

### *Ceratostigma plumbaginoides* – Hardy Plumbago, Blue Leadwort

- this Asian native is a low groundcover-like plant that can be used at the front of beds or under shrubs
- true-blue flowers bloom in late summer; attractive foliage with new growth emerging bronze-red, entire plant reddens in fall, semi-evergreen
- 8-12" tall and spreading in full to partial sun
- if you would like something taller *C. willmottianum* also does well in area gardens

### *Lycoris radiata* – Spider Lily, Hurricane Lily

- 2' tall naked flower stalks emerge from the ground in late summer; unusual bright red flowers; native to Japan
- strap-like foliage emerges in the fall and persists through winter into spring when it goes dormant
- does best in light shade in moist well drained soil; frequently forms colonies
- other *Lycoris* species offer different colored flowers

### *Solidago* species – Goldenrod

- many U.S. and Virginia native species; golden yellow flowers in late summer to early fall; very pollinator friendly
- size varies by selection, but most are in the 2-3' range

- full to partial sun; most are very drought tolerant, but there are species that tolerate wet soils too; look for cultivars that form clumps if you do not want a spreader

### *Anemone x hybrida* – Japanese Anemone

- late summer/early fall pink or white flowers are held on tall stems
- does best in light or bright shade, evenly moist, rich soil
- grows 2-3' tall or more and spreads easily if happy
- several good cultivars available including 'Honerine Jobert', the 2016 Perennial Plant of the Year as chosen by the Perennial Plant Association (PPA)

### *Tricyrtis hirta* – Japanese Toad Lily

- unusually orchid-like fall blooms; white with pink to purple spots
- 2-2.5' tall and wide
- partial to full shade in moist well drained soil; tolerant of occasional drought

### *Chrysanthemum* hybrids – Hardy Chrysanthemum

- this is a large group of plants that differ from "florists mums" commonly available in the fall; they are hardier and need no special care to bloom; attractive to butterflies
- sizes vary by selection, but all prefer full sun in soil with good drainage; forgiving; deer resistant
- many cultivars available with the most common being 'Sheffield Pink', but 'Cambodian Queen', 'Ryan's Pink', and 'Bolero' are very nice as well

### *Farfugium japonicum* – Leopard Plant

- an Asian native grown more for its mostly evergreen foliage than for its bright yellow, fall-blooming flowers

- the foliage is striking and glossy with the most common variety spotted with yellow (hence the leopard), but others are variegated with white, or have unusually large, or crinkled foliage
- prefers partial to full shade in moist well drained soil
- 1-2' tall depending on cultivar

### *Amsonia hubrichtii* – Arkansas Blue Star

- rare in its native Arkansas, but thankfully found at nurseries; it is one of my favorite perennials
- primarily grown for its fine fern-like foliage which adds great texture to the garden and turns a spectacular golden yellow in the fall
- pale, skim milk blue flowers in spring
- 3' tall and wide, but I've seen it larger
- full sun is best, but will tolerate light shade; tolerant of a wide range of soils including dry soil; deer resistant

### *Iris unguicularis* – Algerian Iris

- native to North Africa; pale blue flowers blooms sporadically beginning in November and continue with no particular schedule until March; attractive evergreen foliage
- full sun in well-drained soil; very drought and heat tolerant

### *Ajanía pacífica* – Silver and Gold Chrysanthemum

- in my garden this Japanese perennial is the last to bloom before winter hits, usually it peaks in late November into early December with golden yellow button-like flowers
- beautiful foliage is edged in silver, makes a great groundcover, persists well into winter
- 6-8" tall, spreads vigorously
- full sun, good drainage, drought tolerant

## *Arum italicum* – Italian Arum

- this plant is grown primarily for its foliage which emerges in fall, persisting through the winter and into mid-spring, after which it goes dormant; arrowhead glossy dark green leaves are mottled with pale green to white; very handsome
- white spathe and spadix flowers appear in late spring; attractive orange fruits ripen in late summer
- part to full shade, not fussy about soil
- grows 12-15” tall; especially toxic; deer resistant
- can be vigorous and has been reported as invasive in other areas, but not on the DCR list; buyer beware!

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