

TOP 12 NATIVE PERENNIALS for Residential Homeowners

PERENNIALS are plants that come back each year. They're planted once, grow and flower, set seed, then die back in the winter (or go dormant). The following spring they sprout and go through the process all over again. Unlike annuals, which usually flower for months, perennials only flower for a few weeks. So their other qualities, in particular foliage color, texture and size, are key to a successful design. Perennials are usually a mainstay of any garden or mixed border, and everyone's always looking for new and exciting perennials to try out. But sometimes the "tried and true" are plants to fall back on, particularly if they are native to our region. Native plants support native wildlife, serving as larval food, as nectar plants, and supporting the wide variety of insects that provide food for birds. Native plants are also adapted to our environmental conditions, so they're able to be resilient once established.

We've listed below our Top 12 Native perennials. These are plants that have high wildlife value. We've chosen them because they're relatively un-fussy, available in the nursery trade, and beautiful as well. There are many other native perennials out there – we encourage you to do further research to determine what's best for your garden!

A word about botanical names, common names and cultivars:

We've listed these plants by their botanical name, with the common name in parentheses. This is because if you want the native plant, you have to ask for the specific botanical name listed below. There may well be more than one common name for a given plant, and there may be non-native plants that share a common name with the one you want. Cultivars are named varieties of the given plant – in other words they've been specifically selected from the natural variants of the plant for a certain quality, like long bloom time, bigger flowers, colored leaves etc. Named cultivars are usually a bit more ornamental than the straight species, and usually easier to find in the nursery trade. Named cultivars are still native, as long as they have the native species as their starting point.



Aquilegia canadensis (Red Columbine). This is a spring-flowering perennial that thrives in shade and will spread throughout the border.



Asclepias incarnata (Swamp milkweed) and *Asclepias tuberosa* (Butterfly weed). These are the two of the hallmarks of the butterfly garden. Plant them in full sun.



Aster novae-angliae (New England Aster). You'll recognize this aster as one of the mainstays of the fall garden. The soft purple color is striking against autumn foliage colors. It's best to pinch these back at least once in early summer to prevent the plant from becoming too leggy.



Coreopsis verticillata (Tickseed). The native form of tickseed is the one with finely-cut thin leaves and small soft-yellow flowers. It likes full sun and well-drained soil. The two most widely planted cultivars are 'Moonbeam' and 'Zagreb'. There are many other tickseed cultivars out there, including those with pink and maroon flowers, but those are not cultivars of the native species.



Cimicifuga racemosa (Bugbane). Often overlooked, this is a spectacular shade perennial. The cultivar 'Brunette' has dark eggplant-colored foliage and grows in part to full shade. It flowers in late summer and fall, sending tall flower stems above the foliage with pink-tinged deliciously-scented blooms.



Dicentra eximia (Fringed Bleeding Heart or Wild Bleeding Heart). This classic shade perennial blooms in spring and has interesting blue-tinged foliage. If you want to plant the native form of Bleeding Heart, check the botanical name of what you're buying, because non-native Bleeding Heart is more showy than the native, so it may tempt you.



Eupatorium purpureum subsp. *maculatum* (Joe Pye Weed). This is another mainstay of the butterfly garden, and can be used in the meadow or the rain garden as well. It prefers full sun and tolerates wet

feet. Joe Pye Weed grows to 7' tall – a more compact cultivar is called 'Little Joe' which will reach a more modest 3-4' tall.



Helenium autumnale (Helen's Flower or Sneezeweed). This plant flowers in mid-summer and with its orange flowers provides an interesting addition to some of the traditional perennial staples like catmint, Lady's mantle, lavender and daylilies. Plant in full sun.



Lobelia cardinalis (Cardinal flower) and *Lobelia siphilitica* (Great Blue Lobelia). Both of these natives are tough and versatile, tolerating just about any conditions. Cardinal flower is beloved by hummingbirds. Their habits are a bit weedy, so plant them in the background.



Rudbeckia fulgida (Black-eyed Susan). Instantly recognizable, Black-eyed Susan is a popular and classic addition to the perennial garden, adding a welcome shot of yellow-orange in summer and prominent seed heads in fall. The most commonly used cultivar is 'Goldsturm'. Plant in full sun for best results, and be aware that this plant will form colonies, so it's best to divide it every so often to maintain diversity.



Solidago rugosa (Rough-stemmed Goldenrod). This is ideally suited for the back of the sunny mixed border or the meadow. It grows to 3-4' tall, with arching panicles of yellow flowers in fall.



Veronicastrum virginicum (Culver's Root). Another tall grower that is ideally suited for the sunny mixed border, the meadow or the rain garden. It grows 3-4' tall with upright flower whitish-purple flower spikes.

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