

FLOWERS TO BEAT THE HEAT

by

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Lack of rain is major cause for concern around the country and if we face the summer months with equally hot, dry conditions, then it is going to be difficult to maintain any sort of a garden without much supplementary watering.

Whist no plant can ultimately survive without water, some are better than others at bearing up through drought conditions. I have put together a list of my favorite top five annuals and perennials that should make it through a hot summer, many blooming with dignity well into the fall.

Annuals

Petunias – Hybrid petunias are now offered in many attractive colors and they are just great for containers. Purple and White Wave petunias are fast establishing and will spread out, taking up significant space over the summer.

Zinnias – These come in all shapes, sizes and colors but stand strong against the heat. Choose a variety to meet your design and color requirements. I am particularly fond of *Zinnia angustifolia* which has a pretty, small, white flower and teamed with *Salvia* ‘Victoria’ (deep blue), together they look tremendous by September.

Marigolds – Yes, these may be very common little plants, but they will thrive and bush out throughout the summer continuing to the first frost. They are also great for containers and as companion plants in the vegetable garden to repel certain unwanted pests.

Spider Flower (*Cleome hassleriana*) – Although this is a somewhat strange looking plant with tall, feathery leaves and flowers, it blooms all summer long in colors of pink, lilac or white. The flowers can grow up to four feet, so put them in a hot corner or behind other plants in your flower bed.

Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*) - Grown en masse and removing spent blooms periodically, these yellow flowers will provide color well into the fall and attract butterflies and hummingbirds as a bonus.

Perennials

Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) – This is definitely a top performing perennial. It produces beautiful pink or white daisy-like flowers and can withstand whatever our Washington climate brings us.

Yarrow – (*Achillea* ‘Coronation Gold’) has very attractive, fern-like foliage and large flat-topped yellow flowers. Continuous bloom can be achieved by removing spent heads and the flowers are also great in dried flower arrangements.

Russian Sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*) – has beautiful aromatic blue-grey foliage throughout the summer and its blue plumes appear later in the season. *Perovskia* ‘Little Spire’ is lower growing than the species (two feet) and is much more compact if you prefer a neater look.

Stokes’ Aster (*Stokesia laevis*) – This is another stalwart bearing blue flowers in June onwards. It is a low growing plant and deadheading the flowers will prolong bloom period.

Sedums – These plants are great for the heat and come in a variety of types. There are low growing sedums on the market that are great for rock gardens and containers (*Sedum rupestre* ‘Angelina’ is a trailing gold sedum) and then there is *Sedum* ‘Autumn Joy’ which comes into its own in late summer. However *Sedum* x ‘Autumn Fire’ is an introduction that has all the attributes of ‘Autumn Joy’ but doesn’t flop at peak bloom and is a nicer looking plant overall.

Hopefully the summer won’t be too brutal for us. Of course if the rain stays away, there is always Cactus to consider!

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