



Flowering Perennials for Florida¹

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Flowering perennials, when selected and used correctly, can provide color in your landscape during every season of the year. Once established, these plants require less maintenance than annual flowers, and they have the advantage of being a permanent part of your landscape.

Perennials are plants that grow indefinitely. The shrubs and trees that comprise our landscapes are perennials, but these are referred to as woody perennials. The plants discussed here are herbaceous perennials, plants that have soft, succulent plant tissue with little or no secondary, woody tissue. Some herbaceous perennials are evergreen. Others die back to the ground during winter, but the roots survive and the foliage eventually reappears.

Plants which grow from bulbs, corms, tubers, or other types of underground storage systems are also herbaceous perennials. The selection and care of these plants is discussed in Circular 552, "Bulbs For Florida."

Selection and Use

The flowering perennials listed in Table 1 are proven performers in Florida gardens. Many other perennials exist, but they may not be suited to Florida's climate and soils.

Perennials are used to best advantage when they are planted in masses. The bold displays of color they provide are much more pleasing than individual plants placed here and there. Evergreen shrubbery provides a beautiful backdrop for large drifts or clumps of herbaceous perennials.

Note the mature size, flowering season and flower color of each perennial you select. Does the foliage die back when freezes occur? How much sunlight does it require?

When designing a bed, think primarily of plant form and texture. Pleasing foliage combinations (clumping with upright forms; delicate with bold textures) give the garden interest long after the flowers are gone.

Flower color is another important design consideration. "Hot" colors such as orange, red and yellow should be grouped together and segregated from the "cool" hues and pastels. White, blue, silver and green go with everything and can be used as transition colors in the garden.

The growth habits of some perennials change when the plant flowers. For example, coneflowers, gerberas and daylilies produce flowers on tall spikes

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above the foliage. Similarly, veronica, shasta and false dragon head are low clumping plants which "stretch up" to bloom.

Consider all these factors when determining how and where plants should be used in the landscape or perennial garden.

Inexperienced perennial growers will find it challenging to design a garden. Luckily, most perennials transplant easily and beds can be rearranged if needed.

Planting and Care

The most important step in establishing perennials is preparing the planting bed. Because most perennials remain in the bed for several years without being divided or moved, proper soil preparation is essential.

Sandy soils should be amended with organic matter such as manure, sewage sludge, peat, compost or leaf mold. Apply several inches of organic matter to the soil surface and work into the top 10–12 inches. A soil pH of 5.5–6.5 is recommended. Many county extension offices will test soil and make pH recommendations.

Space the plants in the bed to allow for their future growth and for cultivation between them. Plant them in the soil so that the top of the root ball is slightly above the ground line. Mulch heavily, at least 2–3 inches, with an organic mulch such as leaves, pine straw or wood chips. A good thick mulch will conserve moisture, moderate soil temperatures, and discourage weeds. Do not allow the mulch to touch the base of the plants. Re-apply mulch as needed.

Most flowering perennials require little maintenance. Fertilizer needs vary with specific perennials and soil types. Let the appearance and growth rate of the plant guide you. Many perennials require little or no fertilizer once established. Others benefit from one to four applications of fertilizer per growing season. A general purpose landscape fertilizer such as 16-4-8 containing slow-release nitrogen can be used. Controlled release fertilizers such as Osmocote can also provide excellent results. Occasional pruning may be needed to remove dead

flower spikes, unsightly leaves or to reduce the size of the plant. Some perennials become top-heavy when in bloom and will need to be staked.

Propagation

The propagation method for each perennial is listed in table 1 . Division is the quickest and easiest method of multiplying most herbaceous perennials. Simply dig the plants and shake off the soil. It will be apparent where to separate the plants into smaller units having roots and leaves. The best time to divide plants is after the blooming season or during milder times of the year. Perennials which are frozen back to the ground can be lifted, divided, and reset at that time with good results. Some perennials are easily grown from seed or cuttings as well. Spring and summer are the appropriate seasons for these forms of propagation.

Pests and Diseases

Although the plants listed here are relatively pest free, perennials should be inspected frequently for insects and diseases. If pests are detected early enough, they can be managed before other plants become infested. Many problems can be prevented by simply hand-picking the insects or infected leaves. For severe infestations, chemical control may be needed.

Perennials can also be damaged by microscopic, wormlike parasites called nematodes. Nematodes feed on roots and may badly damage the root system of some perennials when present in sufficient numbers. Severely infested beds should be fumigated and replanted with new plants. For recommendations on the selection and application of soil fumigants, insecticides and fungicides, contact the Cooperative Extension Service in your county.

Table 1. Useful Information for Growing Flowering Perennials in Florida

Name	Zones	Growth Habit	Common Height	Flower Color/Season	Light Conditions	Soil Type	Salt Spray Tolerant	Cold Hardy*	Method of Propagation
African Iris (<i>Dietes</i> spp.)	N,C,S	Clumping	2'	White, Yellow/ Year-round	Sun, partial shade	Wide range, drought tolerant	No	Yes	Division
Use/Comments: Background, bedding.									
Blackberry Lily (<i>Belamcanda chinensis</i>)	N,C,S	Upright	3'	Orange-red/ June-October	Sun	Wide range, drought tolerant	No	Yes	Seed, division
Use/Comments: Background, plantings, Iris-like foliage.									
Blue Daze (<i>Evolvulus glomerata</i>)	N,C,S	Spreading	1-2'	Blue/ Year-round	Sun	Wide range	Yes	No	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Mass plantings, ground cover.									
Blue-eyed Grass (<i>Sisyrinchium</i> spp.)	N,C,S	Clumping	6-8'	Blue/ March-May	Sun	Moist	No	Yes	Division
Use/Comments: Edging, massing, Florida native.									
Blue Sage (<i>Eranthemum pulchellum</i>)	C,S	Upright	3-5'	Deep blue/ Winter	Partial shade	Well-drained	Yes	No	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Background, massing.									
Butterfly Bush (<i>Buddleiaspp.</i>)	N,C	Sprawling	4-6'	Deep purple, lilac, white/ Year-round	Sun, partial shade	Well-drained	Yes	No	Cuttings, air layers
Use/Comments: Background, specimen.									
Butterfly Weed (<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>)	N,C,S	Erect, slightly spreading	1-3'	Orange-red/ May-September	Sun, partial shade	Well-drained, drought tolerant	No	No	Division, seed

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Use/Comments: Somewhat difficult. Attracts butterflies, bees, hummingbirds, Florida native. Reseeds.									
Cardinal's Guard (<i>Pachystachys coccinea</i>)	C, S	Upright, many stemmed	3-7'	Scarlet/ Summer-Early Fall	Shade	Fertile, well-drained	No	No	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Background, massing.									
Chrysanthemum, Garden Mum (<i>Dendranthema grandiflora</i>)	N, C	Spreading	1-2'	Many colors/ Fall-Spring	Sun	Fertile, well-drained	No	Yes	Cuttings, division
Use/Comments: Bedding. Pinch once or twice until August 15 to induce branching.									
Cigar Flower (<i>Cuphea micropetala</i>)	N, C	Upright	3-4'	Yellow, orange/ Fall	Sun	Drought tolerant	?	No	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Bedding. Attracts hummingbirds.									
Coneflower (<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>)	N, C, S	Clumping	2-3'	Purple, white/ Warm months	Sun	Well-drained, drought tolerant	No	Yes	Seed, division
Use/Comments: Bedding, cut flower. Try Bravado, Bright Star, White Swan.									
Coreopsis (<i>Coreopsis</i> spp.)	N, C, S	Spreading	6-18'	Yellow/ Spring-Fall	Sun	Well-drained, drought tolerant	Yes	Yes	Seed, division
Use/Comments: Massing, edging.									
Daisy Bush (<i>Gamolepis</i> spp., <i>Euryops</i> spp.)	N, C, S	Erect, bushy	3'	Yellow/ Year-round	Sun, partial shade	Wide range, drought tolerant	Yes	No	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Background, bedding.									
Dayflower (<i>Commelina</i> spp.)	N, C, S	Upright, clumping	1-2'	Blue, white/ Summer	Sun, partial shade	Wide range, drought tolerant	No	Yes	Division, seed
Use/Comments: Background, bedding. Florida native.									

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Daylily (<i>Hemerocallis</i> spp.)	N,C,S	Clumping	1-2'	Many colors/ March-June	Sun, shifting shade	Wide range, drought tolerant	Yes	Yes	Division, seed
Use/Comments: Background, border plantings, massing.									
False Dragon Head (<i>Physostegia</i> <i>virginiana</i>)	N,C,S	Upright	2-3'	White, pink, lilac/ Fall	Sun, shade	Wide range	No	No	Seed
Use/Comments: Massing, cut flower. Invasive.									
Firespike (<i>Odontonema</i> <i>strictum</i>)	N,C,S	Upright	6'	Red/ Summer-Fall	Sun, partial shade	Fertile, well-drained	No	No	Cuttings, division
Use/Comments: Background. Attracts hummingbirds, butterflies.									
Fleabane, Mexican Daisy (<i>Erigeron</i> <i>Karvinskianus</i>)	N,C,S	Spreading	6'	White/ Year-round	Sun	Well-drained, drought tolerant	No	Yes	Cuttings, seed
Use/Comments: Ground cover, edging.									
Gaillardia, Blanket Flower (<i>Gaillardia</i> spp. and hybrids)	N,C,S	Short, sprawling	1-2'	Yellow, orange-red/ Summer-Fall	Sun	Well-drained, drought tolerant	Yes	Yes	Seed, division
Use/Comments: Massing, cut flower. Florida native. Try Goblin, Burgundy.									
Gaura (<i>Gaura</i> <i>Lindheimeri</i>)	N,C	Clumping	2-4'	White/ Year-round	Sun	Well-drained, drought tolerant	No	Yes	Cuttings, seed
Use/Comments: Massing.									
Gerbera Daisy (<i>Gerbera</i> <i>Jamesonii</i>)	N,C,S	Clumping	12-18'	Many colors/ Year-round	Sun, partial shade	Fertile, well-drained	Yes	No	Division, seed

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Use/Comments: Bedding, cut flower. Keep crowns above ground.									
Golden Shrimp Plant (<i>Pachystachys lutea</i>)	C,S	Upright	3-4'	Yellow/ Warm months	Partial shade	Wide range	No	No	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Background.									
Goldenrod (<i>Solidago spp.</i>)	N,C	Clumping	1-6'	Yellow/ Summer-Fall	Sun	Wide range	Yes	Yes	Division, seed
Use/Comments: Background, bedding. Florida native. Invasive.									
Hosta (<i>Hosta spp.</i>)	N	Clumping	18-24'	White, lilac/ Summer	Shade	Fertile, moist	No	Yes	Division
Use/Comments: Massing, edging.									
Jacobinia (<i>Justicia carnea</i>)	C,S	Erect, bushy	2-4'	Rose, white/ Warm months	Shade, partial shade	Fertile, moist	No	No	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Background, massing.									
Lion's Ear (<i>Leonotis Leonurus</i>)	N,C,S	Upright	4-5'	Orange/ Fall-Spring	Sun	Well-drained	Yes	No	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Background. Prune tips to keep plant bushy.									
Mallow (<i>Hibiscus Moscheutos</i>)	N,C	Upright, shrubby	2-5'	White, rose, red, pink/ Summer	Sun	Fertile, well-drained	Yes	No	Seed
Use/Comments: Background.									
Mexican Hat Plant (<i>Ratibida columnifera</i>)	S	Clumping	2'	Red, Orange/ Summer	Sun	Wide Range	No	No	Seed, division
Use/Comments: Massing, ground cover.									

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Mexican Heather (<i>Cuphea</i> <i>hyssopifolia</i>)	N,C,S	Rounded	18'	Purple, white/ Year-round	Sun, partial shade	Well-drained	No	No	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Massing, edging, ground cover. Prune frequently.									
Pentas (<i>Pentas</i> <i>lanceolata</i>)	N,C,S	Sprawling shrub	4'	Red, pink, white, lilac/ Year-round	Sun, shifting shade	Well-drained, drought tolerant	No	No	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Background plantings, cut flower. Attracts butterflies.									
Philippine violet (<i>Barleria cristata</i>)	N,C,S	Upright	4'	Lavender, white/ October-April	Sun, partial shade	Wide range	No	No	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Background. Reseeds.									
Phlox, Creeping or moss (<i>Phlox</i> <i>subulata</i>)	N,C	Spreading	3-4'	Pink, blue, lavender/ April-May	Sun	Wide range	No	Yes	Division, cuttings
Use/Comments: Ground cover, border.									
Phlox, blue (<i>Phlox divaricata</i>)	N	Spreading	12'	Blue/ Early spring	Partial shade	Moist, well-drained	No	Yes	Division, cuttings
Use/Comments: Massing.									
Phlox, Garden (<i>Phlox paniculata</i>)	N	Clumping, upright	2-3'	Magenta/ Summer, Fall	Sun, partial shade	Moist, well-drained	No	No	Division, cuttings
Use/Comments: Massing.									
Pincushion Flower (<i>Scabiosa</i> <i>caucasica</i>)	C,S	Clumping	1'	Blue/ Year-round	Sun, partial shade	Well-drained	No	Yes	Division, seed
Use/Comments: Bedding.									

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Pinks, Sweet William (<i>Dianthus spp.</i>)	N,C	Rounded	6-18'	Reds, pinks, white/ Fall-Spring	Partial shade	Well-drained, drought tolerant	No	Yes	Seed
Use/Comments: Massing, edging. Short-lived, unsightly in summer.									
Plumbago (<i>Plumbago auriculata</i>)	N,C,S	Sprawling shrub	3-6'	Blue, white/ Year-Round	Sun, partial shade	Wide range	Yes	No	Cuttings, division
Use/Comments: Background, massing.									
Rudbeckia (<i>Rudbeckia fulgida</i> Goldsturm)	N,C	Clumping	18-36'	Yellow/ Summer	Sun	Well-drained	No	No	Division, cuttings
Use/Comments: Massing, cut flower.									
Ruellia (<i>Ruellia spp.</i>)	N,C,S	Erect, bushy	2-3'	Blue, violet, red, pink/ May-November	Sun, partial shade	Well-drained, drought tolerant	Yes	No	Seed, cuttings
Use/Comments: Background, bedding.									
Russian Sage (<i>Perovskia atriplicifolia</i>)	N,C,S	Upright	18-24'	Lavender/ Summer	Sun	Well-drained, drought tolerant	No	Yes	Seed
Use/Comments: Bedding. Fragrant foliage.									
Salvias, Sages (<i>Salvia spp.</i>)	N,C,S	Upright, bushy	2-5'	Blues, red, pink, yellow, white/ Species dependent	Sun	Well-drained, drought tolerant	Generally no	Depends on species	Cuttings, division
Use/Comments: Background, massing. Many species exist.									
Shasta Daisy (<i>Chrysanthemum superbum</i>)	N,C	Clumping	1-2'	White/ Late Spring	Sun	Fertile, moist	No	Yes	Division, seed
Use/Comments: Border, bedding, cut flower.									

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Shrimp Plant (<i>Justicia Brandegeana</i>)	N,C,S	Sprawling	4-6'	Reddish-brown/ Spring, Summer	Sun, shifting shade	Wide range	No	No	Cuttings, division
Use/Comments: Mass plantings, background. Attracts hummingbirds.									
Stokes Aster (<i>Stokesia laevis</i>)	N,C,S	Clumping	1'	Blue, white/ Summer	Sun, partial shade	Well-drained, drought tolerant	Yes	Yes	Division, seed
Use/Comments: Border, bedding, cut flower. Florida native.									
Swamp Sunflower (<i>Helianthus angustifolius</i>)	N,C	Upright	4' +	Yellow/ Fall	Sun, partial shade	Sun, partial shade	No	No	Division, seed
Use/Comments: Background. Florida native.									
Verbena (<i>Verbena spp. and hybrids</i>)	N,C,S	Sprawling	6-8'	Red, pink, white, lavender/ March-October	Sun, partial shade	Fertile, drought tolerant	No	Yes	Cuttings, seed
Use/Comments: Massing, ground cover.									
Veronica, Speedwell (<i>Veronica spicata</i>)	N,C	Upright, clumping	12-18'	Blue, white, pink/ Summer	Sun, partial shade	Fertile, moist	No	Yes	Seed, cuttings
Use/Comments: Bedding, cut flower.									
Yarrow (<i>Achillea millefolium</i>)	N,C,S	Clumping	18'	White, pink/ Spring	Sun	Wide range	No	Yes	Division, seed
Use/Comments: Bedding, spreading. May be difficult.									
Yellow Alder (<i>Turnera ulmifolia</i>)	S	Upright	2'	Yellow/ Year-round	Sun	Wide range	No	No	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Attracts butterflies.									
*Cold Hardy--"No" indicates that the plant is killed to the ground by frost or freeze, but recovers quickly.									