



got to have it

June 2009

Our 3 Favorite Perennials

By Judy Alleruzzo

When helping other gardeners in their plant selections I continually am asked "What are my favorite Perennials?" To a gardener this is a cruel question. What do I like right now, this minute? What will bloom in the next few weeks? What is my favorite color, texture, habitat this moment? How do you narrow it down? There are just too many fabulous Perennials to have a favorite.

A deep breath, and excuses aside, if you make me pick my 'got to have it' Perennials, these three are definitely on the top of my list.

'Walker's Low' Catmint (*Nepeta*)

I love this Catmint for its amazing bloom time. Traditionally, it is Annuals that offer the continuous spring-summer bloom. 'Walker's Low', named after a place in England, will begin blooming Mid-May and will continue until the fall. Lavender-blue flower spikes and silvery foliage look a bit like English lavender from a distance. At maturity this Catmint gets to be 2-3 feet in size. Drought-tolerant after established, it thrives in full sun or a place that gets afternoon shade. The foliage is aromatic making it wonderfully deer resistant.



Delphiniums

The classic, tall beauty of Delphiniums is my next pick. They are reminiscent of an English Garden, the quintessential 'Cottage Garden' plant. Their tall, spiky flowers bloom in a rainbow of colors. I'm not the only one that is fond of this sun-loving Perennial. Hummingbirds and Butterflies will frequent your garden to enjoy them. They are also great for use as a cut flower. Delphiniums want soil that is evenly moist, compost-rich and has good drainage. Some varieties can reach up to 5-6 foot tall and require staking.



Are you seeing a pattern here? Lots of flowers.

Peruvian Lily (*Alstroemeria*)

Peruvian Lilies are a beautiful addition to the garden. Another competitor for attention in the world of Annual color, these plants bloom from late May until frost. One year I was able to pick a few of their flowers for our Thanksgiving dinner table. They love full sun, evenly moist, compost-rich soil and good drainage. One tip on *Alstroemeria*: pop the flower stems from the base of the plant instead of cutting them. You do this by gently grasping the base of the flower stem and giving it a gentle tug. The stem will pop off from the roots. This technique helps the plant form new flower stems quickly.



These three are also my favorites because they are easy to care for in your garden. After feeling a little irritated about having to make a choice I decide that William wasn't getting off the hook. I wasn't surprised to hear his response. William's garden is like a botanical garden. He's a collector of unusual plants. I really know my plants, and still he'll stump me with a name or two. Here's William's picks; they are not easy to find but try Portland Nursery - Division St., Cistus Nursery, Joy Creek or Dancing Oaks. If you don't find William's picks by going there, I'm sure you'll find many other treasures.

'White Giant' Calla
(*Zantedeschia aethiopica*)

Hardy, hardy, hardy. Outside of being loved by slugs, this calla is an amazing performer. It will take sun or shade, and temperatures down to zero degrees. 'White Giant' is just that. The plant matures to 6-7 feet, with huge white flowers that are 8 inches long. It's breath-taking in the garden.



Fern Leaf Peony
(*Paeonia tenuifolia*)

Gosh, where to begin on what makes this one outstanding. This Peony offers dark magenta, almost red, flowers that bloom from May until June. It thrives in the full sun, but can take some afternoon shade. Its foliage is what sells it. The beautiful fern-like foliage will stay gorgeous until first frost. Hardy to -30F, at maturity it will only get about 2 feet tall.



Petasites japonicus

Commonly known as "Tractor Seat" or "Coltsfoot". The leaves of the plant actually look like a seat from a tractor. They are huge - averaging up to 30 inches in diameter. It thrives in shade and likes moist soil. William suggests allowing it to dry out a bit between waterings. As tropical as it looks, it will take temperatures as low as -20F. It's a vigorous, clumping plant that will reach a mature height between 3 and 5 feet.

Well, here's a few of our favorites you can go check out at a local garden center. You never know, they might just become your favorite Perennials too!