

Perennial Gardening in Florida¹

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Flowering perennials 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 more 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 with little or no woody tissue. However, under the continuous growing conditions of south Florida, some herbaceous perennials become woody shrubs. Likewise, plants that are normally woody shrubs in south Florida behave as herbaceous perennials in north Florida where they are killed to the ground each winter.

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," here: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG029>.

Selection and Use

The flowering perennials listed in Table 1 are good performers in Florida gardens or in containers.

Many other perennials exist, but they may not be suited to Florida's climate and soils.

Some 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 and flowering shrubs provide a beautiful backdrop for masses of small perennials, whereas large-growing perennials can be used as specimen plants.

Note the mature size of each perennial you select. Most large-growing perennials can be maintained as a smaller plant, but it may require frequent pruning to keep them that way. Is the perennial tender or hardy to cold? Tender perennials will need cold protection during frosts or freezes. How much sunlight does it require? When does it flower? Ideally, a garden should have a succession of blooms throughout the year.

When designing a bed, think 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 and foliage color is another important design consideration. "Warm" colors such as orange,

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red and yellow should be grouped together and segregated from the "cool" hues and pastels. White, blue, silver/gray and green go with everything and can be used as transition colors in the garden. Repetition of color and form pulls the eye through the garden and provides a pleasing cohesiveness.

Consider all these factors when determining how and where plants should be used in the landscape or perennial garden. Inexperienced perennial growers may find it challenging to design a garden. Luckily, most perennials transplant well and beds can be easily 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, peat, or compost. Apply several inches of organic matter to the soil surface and work into the top 10 to 12 inches. A soil pH of 5.5 to 6.5 is recommended. Many county Extension offices 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 to 3 inches, with an organic mulch such as leaves, pine straw or wood chips. A thick mulch will conserve moisture, insulate roots from heat and cold, and discourage weeds. Do not allow the mulch to touch the base of the plants and re-apply it as needed.

Most flowering perennials require little maintenance other than occasional pruning and fertilizing. Timing of fertilizer applications and amounts may vary with different plants and parts of the state. 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 light applications of fertilizer per growing season. A general purpose landscape fertilizer containing equal amounts of nitrogen and potassium and low to no phosphorus (such as 15-0-15) is

recommended. Controlled-release fertilizers such as Osmocote, Nutricote or Polycon, can also provide excellent results. Occasional pruning may be needed to remove dead flower spikes or 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 some 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 that 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, worm-like parasites called nematodes, which live in soil. Nematodes feed on roots and may badly damage the root systems of some perennials when present in sufficient numbers. Severely infested beds should be fumigated or solarized and replanted with new plants. For information on soil fumigants, soil solarization, insecticides and fungicides contact your county's Extension office, here:
<http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/map/>

Reference

Brown, Sydney Park and Rick Schoellhorn,
Your Florida Guide to Perennials. University Press of
Florida, Gainesville, FL 2006.

This document was first published as
Flowering Perennials for Florida in 1991 by Brown,
S. P., Hodyss, L., and Marshall, D.

Table 1. Useful Information for Selecting and 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 species</i>)	N,C,S	Clumping	3'	White, Yellow/ Year-round	Sun, light shade	Wide range, very drought tolerant	No	Hardy	Division
Use/Comments: Background, bedding.									
Beach Sunflower (<i>Helianthus debilis</i>)	N,C,S	Ground cover	6-10"	Yellow/ Year-round	Sun	Well drained, very wide range, very drought tolerant	Yes	Tender	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Ground cover, wildflower garden, attracts butterflies. Florida native.									
Begonia, Hardy Begonia (<i>Begonia species</i>)	N,C,S	Upright, rounded, or ground cover	Varies	White, pinks, reds/ Winter, Spring, some year-round	Light to full shade	Moist, organic	No	Tender	Stem or leaf cuttings, division
Use/Comments: Hosta replacement in the shade garden, best in Central to South Florida. Best performers are Cane, Angel Wing and rhizomatous types (other than Rex). Wax Begonias <i>B. semperflorens</i> are normally treated as annuals, although they can be long-lived in central and south FL.									
Blackberry Lily (<i>Belamcanda chinensis</i>)	N,C,S	Upright	3'	Orange-red/ June-October	Sun	Wide range, drought tolerant	No	Hardy	Division, seed
Use/Comments: Background, massing. Iris-like foliage.									
Blue Daze (<i>Evolvulus glomerata</i> 'Blue Daze')	N,C,S	Spreading	1-2'	Blue/ Year-round	Sun	Wide range	Yes	Tender	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Mass plantings, ground cover. Often suffers from a leaf fungal disease in summer. May not survive a hard freeze in north FL.									
Blue Sage (<i>Eranthemum pulchellum</i>)	C,S	Upright	3-5'	Deep blue/ Winter	Light to full shade	Well-drained	Yes	Tender	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Background, massing. Prune back after flowering.									
Bulbine (<i>Bulbine frutescens</i>)	C,S	Clumping	1-2'	Orange, yellow/ Spring, Summer	Sun to light shade	Well-drained, drought tolerant	Yes	Hardy	Division, seed
Use/Comments: Ground cover, container. 'Hallmark' is a sterile cultivar.									

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Bush Daisy, African Bush Daisy (<i>Euryops pectinatus</i>)	C, S	Erect, bushy	2-3'	Yellow/ Spring, Summer, Fall	Sun to light shade	Well drained, wide range, somewhat drought tolerant	Yes	Semi- hardy	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Massing, mid-border, attracts butterflies.									
Cat's Whiskers (<i>Orthosiphon aristatus</i>)	C, S	Upright	2-3'	White, pale lavender/ Year-round	Sun to light shade	Moist, fertile, organic	No	Tender	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Mid border, accent plant, attracts butterflies/hummingbirds.									
Chrysanthemum, Garden Mum (<i>Chrysanthemum grandiflora</i>)	N, C	Spreading	1-2'	Many colors/ Fall-Spring	Sun	Fertile, well-drained	No	Hardy	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	Tender	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Bedding. Attracts hummingbirds.									
Daylily (<i>Hemerocallis species</i>)	N, C, S	Clumping	1-3'	Many colors/ March-June	Sun, shifting shade	Wide range, drought tolerant	Yes	Semi- hardy	Division, seed
Use/Comments: Background, border plantings, massing.									
Firebush (<i>Hamelia patens</i>)	N, C, S	Rounded	4-6'	Red-orange/ warm months	Sun to light shade	Wide range, very drought tolerant	Yes	Tender	Air layers, cuttings, seed
Use/Comments: Back of border, accent plant, attracts butterflies/hummingbirds. Florida native.									
Firecracker Plant, Coral Plant (<i>Russelia equisetiformis</i>)	C, S	Rounded/ Weeping	3'	Red, pale yellow, coral/Year-round	Sun to light shade	Well drained, somewhat drought tolerant	Yes	Tender	Division, tip cuttings
Use/Comments: Massing, accent plant, container, attracts butterflies/hummingbirds. <i>R. sarmentosa</i> is another nice garden perennial with red flowers.									

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Firespike (<i>Odontonema cuspidate</i> - syn. <i>O. strictum</i>)	N,C,S	Upright	6'	Red/ Summer-Fall	Sun to light shade	Fertile, well-drained	No	Tender	Cuttings, division
Use/Comments: Background. Attracts hummingbirds/butterflies. <i>O. callistachyum</i> bears purple flowers January-March.									
Flax Lily (<i>Dianella tasmanica</i> 'Variegata')	N,C,S	Clumping	1-2'	Small blue/ Winter, Spring	Sun or shade	Moist, well-drained	Unknown	Hardy	Division
Use/Comments: Grown for its attractive, variegated iris-like foliage. Ground cover, specimen or container. May re-seed. Tends to develop scale insect problems in shade.									
Fleabane, Mexican Daisy (<i>Erigeron karvinskianus</i>)	N,C,S	Spreading	6"	White/ Year-round	Sun	Well-drained, drought tolerant	No	Hardy	Cuttings, seed
Use/Comments: Ground cover, edging. May re-seed.									
Gaura (<i>Gaura lindheimeri</i>)	N,C	Clumping	2-4'	White or pink Year-round	Sun	Well-drained, drought tolerant	No	Tender	Cuttings, seed
Use/Comments: Massing.									
Gerbera Daisy (<i>Gerbera jamesonii</i>)	N,C,S	Clumping	12-18"	Many colors/ Year-round	Sun to light shade	Fertile, well-drained	Yes	Tender	Division, seed
Use/Comments: Bedding, cut flower. Keep crowns above ground. Marginal in south Fl.									
Golden Dewdrop (<i>Duranta erecta</i>)	C,S	Upright	4-6'	Blue, white, purple/ Summer, Fall	Sun to light shade	Well-drained, drought tolerant	Yes	Tender	Cuttings, seed
Use/Comments: Accent plant, attracts butterflies/ hummingbirds. Attractive cultivars include 'Sapphire Showers' and 'Cuban Gold'.									
Golden Shrimp Plant (<i>Pachystachys lutea</i>)	C,S	Upright	3-4'	Yellow/ warm months	Light to deep shade	Wide range	No	Tender	Cuttings

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Use/Comments: Background.									
Heliotrope, Scorpion Tail or Butterfly Heliotrope (<i>Heliotropium angiospermum</i>)	C,S	Rounded	3'	White/ Year round	Sun to light shade	Drought and flood tolerant	No	Tender	Cuttings, seed
Use/Comments: Mid-border, transition plant, wildflower garden, attracts butterflies. Florida native.									
Jacobinia (<i>Justicia carnea</i>)	C,S	Erect, bushy	2-4'	Rose, white/ warm months	Light to full shade	Fertile, moist	No	Tender	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Background, massing. Frequently remove old blooms.									
Jewels of Opar (<i>Talinum paniculatum</i> 'Variegata')	C,S	Rounded to upright	3'	Pink/ Summer	Light to deep shade	Rich, moist	Unknown	Tender	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Mid-border, massing. Green form of this plant re-seeds and becomes very weedy.									
Lantana (<i>Lantana</i> species)	N,C,S	Ground cover, rounded, upright	Varies	Red, pink, orange, yellow, white/ warm months	Sun	Well-drained, wide range, very drought tolerant	Yes	Tender	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Massing, ground cover (depending on type); attracts butterflies/hummingbirds. Native species exist. <i>Lantana camara</i> is considered invasive in south and central Florida and is not recommended; use with caution in north FL. Purple Weeping Lantana (<i>L. montevidensis</i>) is not considered invasive in Florida. Further assessment of potentially pollen- and seed-sterile cultivars of <i>L. camara</i> in 2007 may result in different conclusions; check the IFAS Assessment website at: < http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/assessment/ > for updated recommendations.									
Leopard Plant (<i>Farfugium japonicum</i>)	N,C,S	Ground cover	2'	Yellow/ Fall, Winter	Light shade	Rich, moist	Unknown	Hardy	Division
Use/Comments: Ground cover, container. Most cultivars have cream or yellow leaf markings.									
Lily of the Nile (<i>Agapanthus</i> species)	N,C	Clumping	2-3'	Blue, Lavender, White/ Summer, Early Fall	Sun to light shade	Fertile, well-drained	Yes	Semi-hardy	Division, seed
Use/Comments: Massing, mid-border, cut flowers.									

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Lion's Ear (<i>Leonotis leonurus</i>)	N,C,S	Upright	4-5'	Orange/ Fall-Spring	Sun	Well-drained	Yes	Tender	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Background. Prune to keep plant bushy.									
Marble Leaf (<i>Peristrophe hyssopifolia</i>)	C,S	Ground	1'	Lavender/ Winter	Sun to light shade	Well-drained	Unknown	Tender	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Ground cover.									
Mexican Heather (<i>Cuphea hyssopifolia</i>)	N,C,S	Rounded	18"	Purple, white/ Year-round	Sun to light shade	Well-drained	No	Tender	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Massing, edging, ground cover. Prune frequently.									
Ornamental Sweet Potato (<i>Ipomoea batatas</i>)	N,C,S	Ground cover	6-12"	Flowers not showy	Sun	Well-drained, wide-range	Unknown	Tender	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Ground cover (seasonal), container. Vigorous plants grown for their attractive foliage. Chartreuse, purple-black, variegated, and copper-colored cultivars exist. Give Ornamental Sweet Potato plants plenty of growing space.									
Peacock Ginger (<i>Kaempferia species</i>)	N,C,S	Ground cover	6-36"	Lavender, white/ Spring, Summer	Light to full shade	Wide range, prefers enriched soil	No	Hardy	Division, seed
Use/Comments: Ground cover, Hostia replacement. Dormant in winter (except in south FL).									
Pentas (<i>Pentas lanceolata</i>)	N,C,S	Rounded to sprawling shrub	4'	Red, pink, white, lilac/ year-round	Sun to light shade	Well-drained, drought tolerant	No	Tender	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Background plantings, cut flower. Attracts butterflies.									
Persian Shield (<i>Strobilanthes dyerianus</i>)	C,S	Rounded	4'	Pale blue/ Winter	Light to full shade	Wide range	Yes	Tender	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Mid-border, massing, accent plant. Winter blooms are unattractive; prune back plants at this time.									

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Pinks (<i>Dianthus</i> species)	N,C	Rounded	6-18"	Reds, pinks, white/ Fall-Spring	Light shade	Well-drained, drought tolerant	No	Hardy	Seed
Use/Comments: Massing, edging, Short-lived, unsightly in summer.									
Philippine Violet (<i>Barleria cristata</i>)	N,C,S	Upright	4'	Lavender, white/ October-April	Sun to light shade	Wide range	No	Tender	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Background. Reseeds and may become weedy in the garden. <i>B. oenotheroides</i> (syn. <i>B. micans</i>) is a 3 foot, upright perennial with yellow flowers fall through early winter.									
Plectranthus (<i>Plectranthus</i> species)	C,S	Rounded, upright, or ground cover	Varies	White, purple, pink/ Summer, Fall or intermittent	Sun to light shade	Rich, organic, moist	No	Semi- hardy	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Front or mid-border, ground cover, container. Many are grown solely for their attractive variegated or silver foliage.									
Plumbago (<i>Plumbago auriculata</i>)	N,C,S	Sprawling shrub	3-6'	Blue, white/ year-Round	Sun to light shade	Wide range	Yes	Tender	Cuttings, division
Use/Comments: Background, massing.									
Porterweed (<i>Stachytarpheta</i> species)	C,S	Upright	Varies	Blues, coral, red, purple/ warm months	Sun to light shade	Well drained, drought tolerant	Yes	Tender	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Massing or accent plant, attracts butterflies/hummingbirds. May re-seed. <i>S. urticifolia</i> may escape cultivation. <i>S. jamaicensis</i> is a FL native.									
Ruellia (<i>Ruellia</i> species)	N,C,S	Varies, Clumping to upright	2-3'	Blue, violet, red, pink/ May-November	Sun to light shade	Well-drained, drought tolerant	Yes	Semi- hardy	Cuttings, seed
Use/Comments: Background, bedding. <i>R. brittoniana</i> / <i>R. tweediana</i> is considered invasive in north and central Florida and is not recommended; use with caution in south FL. Further assessment in 2007 may result in different conclusions for the sterile cultivar 'Purple Showers'; check the IFAS Assessment website at: < http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/assessment/ > for up-dated recommendations.									

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Salvias, Sages (<i>Salvia</i> species)	N,C,S	Upright, bushy	2-5'	Blues, red, pink, yellow, white/ Species dependent	Sun	Well-drained, drought tolerant	Generally no	Variable by species	Division, cuttings
Use/Comments: Background, massing. Many species exist.									
Sanchezia (<i>Sanchezia nobilis</i>)	C,S	Upright	3-8'	Yellow/ Summer	Sun, shade	Rich, well drained	Yes	Tender	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Back of border, massing, accent plant, container.									
Shrimp Plant (<i>Justicia brandegeana</i>)	N,C,S	Sprawling	4-6'	Reddish-brown and other colors/ Spring, Summer	Sun to light shade	Wide range	No	Tender	Cuttings, division
Use/Comments: Mass plantings, background. Attracts hummingbirds. 'Flava' (yellow), 'Jambaleya' (red) and 'Fruit Cocktail' (chartreuse and pink) are popular cultivars.									
St. Bernard's Lily (<i>Anthericum liliago</i>)	N,C,S	Upright, clumping	2'	White/ Year-round	Sun, shade	Moist, well- drained	Unknown	Hardy	Division, seed
Use/Comments: Mixed or mass plantings, container, specimen.									
Trailing Wishbone Flower (<i>Torenia</i> hybrids)	C,S	Ground cover	3-6"	Deep blue, purple, pink, white/ warm months	Light to full shade	Fertile, moist, well- drained	No	Tender	Cuttings, seed
Use/Comments: Back of border, accent plant, attracts hummingbirds. Very tolerant of heat and humidity.									
Tropical Jasmines (<i>Cestrum</i> species)	N,C,S	Rounded to upright	up to 15'	Varies by species/Fall, Winter, Spring	Sun to light shade	Wide range	Depends on type	Hardy	Cuttings, seed
Use/Comments: Back of border, accent plant. Prune to maintain a smaller size. Caution: <i>C. diurnum</i> may escape cultivation.									
Verbena (<i>Verbena</i> species and hybrids)	N,C,S	Sprawling	6-8"	Red, pink, white, lavender/ March-October		Fertile, drought tolerant	No	Semi- hardy	Cuttings, seed
Use/Comments: Massing, ground cover. 'Sissinghurst', a rose-pink cultivar, appears reliable in south FL.									
Yellow Alder (<i>Turnera ulmifolia</i>)	C,S	Upright	2'	Yellow or cream Year-round	Sun	Wide range	No	Tender	Cuttings
Use/Comments: Attracts butterflies.									

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*Hardy---Frost and freeze hardy. Semi-hardy---Some plant damage from frost or freeze. Tender---indicates that the plant is killed to the ground by frost or freeze, but recovers quickly.