

## Adding Color to Your Green World<sup>©</sup>

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### INTRODUCTION

With a steady stream of new perennials to hit the market (and no indication this is slowing down!), it can be quite a challenge to select perennials for your program that will meet your customer's needs for great color and beauty that will thrive in their landscape with minimal care. For a grower whose primary business focus is not perennials, the job of maintaining a worthwhile perennial program can be even more challenging when all the perennials are available in just about every liner size you can imagine. What is a grower to do with all the choices? There are some excellent perennial plant selections as well as ideas for production specifically for growers looking to find solutions to balancing a profitable perennial program while still maintaining focus on other important aspects of their nursery business.

### SPRING COLOR

#### ***Euphorbia polychroma* 'Bonfire' PP18585**

*Euphorbia polychroma* 'Bonfire' PP18585 blooms in the spring. However it really offers three seasons of color from spring through fall. It is a tough, deer resistant plant. Consider bare-root plants for faster finish versus seedling plugs that require more time to bulk-up. Do not over-water or over-fertilize *E. polychroma* 'Bonfire' in containers.

#### ***Geum* 'Totally Tangerine' PP22041**

*Geum* 'Totally Tangerine' PP22041 is a vigorous *Geum* with amazing flower power in spring. It is sterile, therefore, offering a very long bloom time. It features lots of nice green foliage that looks great in spring and summer, though the plant may need to be shaded in the afternoon in very hot summer climates. Large plugs (such as 32 or 20 cell) are sufficient for spring finish, or smaller plugs (such as 72 or 50 cell) can be planted in summer or early fall for next season's spring sales. As the foliage becomes denser, be sure to provide good air circulation!

#### ***Amsonia* 'Blue Ice'**

*Amsonia* 'Blue Ice' blooms with bright blue flowers in spring that are larger when compared to other *Amsonia* flowers. 'Blue Ice' is a tough plant when established. It has a short stature, tidy habit and its green foliage turns to bright yellow in the fall. Consider purchasing *Amsonia* as bare-root material in spring for quick-turn 1-gal containers. Plugs should be planted in the early summer for sales the next spring. When planting bare-root, be sure to completely cover the crowns and eyes with soil; plugs should be given ample time to bulk-up during the summer to survive dormancy and emerge in the spring.

### SUMMER COLOR

#### **Hardy *Hibiscus***

Hardy *Hibiscus* has undergone a renaissance in recent years. New cultivars offer bloom from mid-July to (almost) frost, rather than the 3 to 4 weeks of summer color of older cultivars. For production, plant bare-root hibiscus in 2 or 3-gal containers in late spring and use smaller plugs (72 cell) for 1-gal containers in late spring. Bare-root, as well as plugs, benefit from pinching to promote more and stronger branches as well as a better habit in a container. Be sure to feed and water them thoroughly especially as they begin to flower. Completely drying out plants in containers will cause hardy hibiscus to defoliate.

***Gaillardia* × *grandiflora* Arizona Series, *Gaillardia* × *grandiflora* ‘Mesa Yellow’, and *Gaillardia* × *grandiflora* Wheeler Series**

*Gaillardia* × *grandiflora* Arizona Series, *Gaillardia* × *grandiflora* ‘Mesa Yellow’, and *Gaillardia* × *grandiflora* Wheeler Series have all shown excellent heat tolerance, are long blooming and the flowers are bright and eye-catching in the garden. Large plugs offer a quicker turn over than small plugs, however, if you can wait a few extra weeks, smaller plugs will often give you a better plant habit in a container.

***Perovskia***

*Perovskia* taxa are tough, heat tolerant plants when established. Consider growing the new, shorter selections such as *P. atriplicifolia* ‘Lisslitt’, Lacey Blue Russian sage pp 20,845 and ‘Walppb’, Peek-a-Blue<sup>®</sup> Russian sage that have a better growth habit in the landscape! In containers, watch fertility. Even more compact cultivars will stretch and split open if over-fertilized and over-watered. Bare-root material planted in late spring offers a mature, well-branched plant right away. Plugs will also work and usually benefit from a shearing 2 to 3 weeks after transplanting to promote more branching.

***Coreopsis verticillata* ‘Zagreb’**

*Coreopsis verticillata* ‘Zagreb’ is an old tried-and-true plant that you just cannot argue with! For production, consider the difference between bare-root versus planting plugs. The bare-root plants shorten crop growing time dramatically, often finishing in 4–5 weeks, when compared to plugs that need considerable bulking-up time and usually require a shearing to promote branching.

***Rudbeckia fulgida* var. *sullivantii* ‘Little Goldstar’ PP22397**

*Rudbeckia fulgida* var. *sullivantii* ‘Little Goldstar’ PP22397 has an awesome, bushy, compact habit. While not entirely resistant to Septoria leaf spot, it will not get it later than ‘Goldsturm’, and it will look healthy for much longer into the season. This is a vigorous grower. A small plug (72 cell) will fill out a 1-gal container in 10-12 weeks. A larger plug (20 cell) will decrease growing time to about 8 weeks.

***Physostegia virginiana* ‘Pink Manners’ PPAF**

*Physostegia virginiana* ‘Pink Manners’ PPAF is strictly clump forming and very upright. It has shiny deep green foliage, and is very long blooming with pink flowers. It is a vigorous grower. A 72-cell plug fills out a 1-gal container in 10-12 weeks, while a 20-cell plug will fill out a 1-gal container in 7-8 weeks. After a first flush of blooms, cut back spent flowers to encourage rebloom.

***Penstemon* ‘Dark Towers’ PP20013**

*Penstemon* ‘Dark Towers’ PP20013 offers deeper purple foliage than ‘Huskers Red’ and pink flowers rather than white flowers. It holds up to heat and humidity well. Bare-root plants offer a quicker turnover in a 1-gal container and rapidly fills a larger container, such as a 2-gal container. Smaller plugs fill out a 1-gal container in 10-12 weeks. Like many dark foliage perennials, the best color is developed when exposed to sufficient natural sunlight (at least 7 days without shade).

**FALL COLOR**

***Sedum* Taxa**

*Sedum* taxa are another tried and true perennial. However, not all are created equal; some taxa tend to stay upright better when in flower, while others are more resistant to *Sedum* stem rot. Selections such as ‘Abbey Dore’, ‘Carl’, ‘Maestro’ and T-Rex have a more upright habit throughout their bloom time while also being more resistant to stem rot. Plant bare-root in 2- or 3-gal or in 1-gal container for a fast production cycle in the spring; plant small plugs in the summer in order to bulk-up plants for spring sales.

***Andropogon gerardii* ‘Indian Warrior’ PPAF**

*Andropogon gerardii* ‘Indian Warrior’ PPAF is smoky green in the summer, changing to colors of red and purple by mid-summer, with the colors deepening into the cooler fall months. When in bloom, it is very upright and striking in the fall garden. The great summer and fall color plus the more upright habit make it an improvement over the straight species. Plant a larger plug in the spring to fill a 1-gal container in 8-10 weeks or a smaller plug in the summer to bulk-up for spring sales.

**PLANT MATERIAL SOURCES**

- Walters Gardens Inc., P.O. Box 137 Zeeland Michigan 49464; [www.waltersgardens.com/](http://www.waltersgardens.com/)
- Stonehouse Nursery LLC., 9319 Lauer Rd. Berrien Springs Michigan 49103; [www.stonehousenursery.com/](http://www.stonehousenursery.com/)
- North Creek Nurseries Inc., 388 North Creek Rd. Landenberg, Pennsylvania 19350; [www.northcreeknurseries.com/](http://www.northcreeknurseries.com/)

