

Favorite perennials for high-altitude gardens

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9/7/10

Since perennials will be in the ground for several years, pre-plant soil preparation is critical. Most herbaceous perennials grow best in moderately fertile, well-drained soil. Wyoming soils are often low in organic matter, nitrogen, and phosphorus. Some have poor drainage and high soluble salts. These problems need to be corrected before planting. The work involved in proper soil preparation will pay dividends many times over because perennials often occupy the same site for many years. Most Wyoming soils are heavy clay, but occasionally sandy types occur. The best method for improving either clay or sandy soil is to add good quality organic matter. This can be well-aged compost, peat moss, or any clean, well-composted organic material. The usual recommendation is to add a layer 2 to 3 inches thick on the top of the garden bed and then spade or till it in to a depth of about 6 inches. Add more organic matter each year around existing perennial plants. Never add sand as a soil amendment unless you have plenty of organic matter, as some types of clay could set up as concrete. Fertilization may or may not be necessary, depending on the results of the soil test, but usually adding a little nitrogen and mainly phosphorus is necessary and maybe some sulfur depending on the ph.

Karen Panter Extension horticulture specialist at the University of Wyoming has some ideas for hardy, shade-loving plants. Several that have fared well include a number of Hosta species. Look for varieties hardy to at least the U.S. Department of Agriculture's cold-hardiness zone 4. Select zone 3 plants to be on the safe side. A favorite is *Bergenia cordifolia*. "Pigsqueak," as it is commonly called, retains its purple/red color throughout the winter and displays bright pink flowers in early June. Some ground covers that thrive in shade to part shade are *Vinca minor* (flowering periwinkle), *Galium odoratum* (sweet woodruff) and *Lamium maculatum* "White Nancy" (nettle).

For those hard-to-deal-with, hot-sunny-dry spots, a good choice would be *Achillea* x "Moonbeam" yarrow which doesn't seem to drop seeds everywhere. You cannot go wrong with the wide variety of *Artemisia* (sage) species and varieties available but beware! Some have very aggressive root systems, and some drop seeds where they're not wanted; many are native, though. Most people tend to over water members of the *Artemisia* family. *Hemerocallis*? Absolutely! One daylily that has great success is a dwarf gold called "Stella d'Oro." Another dwarf daylily called "Raspberry Pixie." And no garden in Wyoming is complete without *Perovskia atriplicifolia* or Russian sage. This plant blooms in late summer with loads of bright blue flowers that bees love. *Callirhoe involucrate* or Winecups has Magenta flowers in mid summer this low growing groundcover provides a very nice colorful addition to your landscape.

Do you need a vine for a sunny wall? Try a honeysuckle called *Lonicera x heckrottii* "Goldflame." Hummingbirds love the trumpet-shaped orange/gold flowers that open in June. If you like, blue, nature's rarest color, plant some *Salvia x sylvestris* "Mainacht" (perennial salvia) or *Veronica teucrium*.

By removing the tops of perennials in the fall when foliage dies back, many diseases and insects can be minimized. Sometimes they over winter on upper plant parts. By removing these in the fall, the chances of re-infection the next growing season will be less. In addition, removing the tops of herbaceous plants after the fall dieback minimizes the trash and leaf collecting capabilities of these plants. They tend to look much neater. There are lots of perennials and

some annuals, which do very well being planted in the fall. Have a happy colorful fall.

The University of Wyoming and the United States Department of Agriculture, Sheridan county Office cooperate.