



## KAT NURSERIES

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## I love Stella D'oro Daylily, but ...

It is spring again and a lot of focus is on trees, but perennials can tie a landscape together and bring color and interest year round. So many new and improved varieties have been developed and their colors and hardiness are incredible. These new selections can replace the old standards and bring a wider variety of colors and habits to choose from. There are also some perennials that have been around for years but have been passed over because they are often unfamiliar or considered old-fashioned but a lot of these have great potential and just need more understanding and exposure. Some need more sun, some need more shade, but all have unique characteristics that make them perfect in their ideal environment.



## Sun Perennials

There are many new varieties of perennials that have been developed over the last few years. Coneflower (*Echinacea* sp) is one species that has been worked with extensively to develop stunning new flower colors. This group has been a standard in this area for some time because of its deer resistance, bright blooms, hardiness and drought tolerance. One of the most exciting new groups of Coneflowers is the Big Sky Series™ developed by ItSaul Plants, which includes After Midnight™ (Emily Saul), Sundown™ (Evan Saul), Harvest Moon™ (Matthew Saul), Summer Sky™ (Katie Saul), Sunrise™, Sunset™ and Twilight™. Summer Sky™ is one of the most colorful, with the ray flowers emerging rose pink and fading at the tips to a soft orange surrounding a deep orange cone. After Midnight™ is an excellent dwarf variety with deep purple black stems and fragrant flowers that are a darker magenta-purple than the species and have a deep red cone. Any of these varieties would look stunning in a sunny, well-drained area.

## Shade Perennials

It sometimes seems like the choices for perennials in a shaded area are limited to Hostas, Coral Bells and Astilbe. These are still good reliable choices but there are also new varieties and many shade perennials that are often overlooked. Many new varieties of Coral Bells have been introduced lately and vary in color from bright lime green and pink, to white and green variegated or almost pure black. One of the most striking of these is *Heuchera x villosa* 'Caramel'; it is a soft golden color with pink undertones to really brighten up the shade. Caramel, along with others in this group (Tiramisu, Citronelle and Mocha), is more heat and drought tolerant than other varieties and can also tolerate a little more sun.

## Underused Perennials

For a sunny area some interesting choices in perennials would be Zebrina Mallow (*Malva x sylvestris* 'Zebrina'), Waterperry Blue Veronica (*Veronica* 'Waterperry Blue') and (*Crocoshmia* sp). Mallow is a shrubby perennial with wide, lobed leaves and very delicate flowers that are white at the edges and deep, plum purple at the center. Waterperry blue Veronica is a low-growing groundcover with deep green-burgundy leaves that have an excellent fall color. The tiny, pure blue flowers cover the plant in mid-spring and glow beautifully against the dark foliage. Crocoshmia has sword-like leaves similar to Iris leaves. The blooms are generally bright red or yellow and look stunning in a mass planting.

A few often-overlooked shade perennials include Lenten Rose (*Helleborus* sp.), Perennial Forget-Me-Not (*Brunnera* sp.) and Meadow Rue (*Thalictrum* sp.). Lenten Rose is one of the first to bloom in late winter with a variety of soft, pastel colors and large, shiny, deep green leaves. Perennial Forget-Me-Not is a low-growing plant with varieties ranging in leaf color from almost pure white and variegated to solid, light green. The tiny, sky blue flowers bloom in clusters above the leaves in mid spring. Meadow Rue is a taller plant with soft blue green leaves. The flowers bloom in clusters and are generally lavender or soft yellow.

Some other perennials that could add something special and make your design stand out from the rest are:

- Balloon Flower (*Platycodon* sp.)
- Hardy Ferns
- Woodland Phlox (*Phlox divaricata*)
- Plumbago (*Ceratostigama plumbagoides*)
- Hardy Geraniums (*Geranium* sp.)
- Turtlehead (*Chelone* sp.)
- Self-Heal (*Prunella* sp.)

Whether you are just adding some color or designing an entire landscape, perennials are very versatile and useful for providing the perfect touches of color and structure. New varieties are great and often a distinct improvement on the species, but some of the older varieties will thrive in the right area and deserve some consideration too.

I love Stella D'oro Daylily too, but ...

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Perennial Production, KAT Nurseries

