Low Maintenance Perennials

Dr. Harlene Hatterman-Valenti
North Dakota State University
h.hatterman.valenti@ndsu.edu

Why include perennials in your landscape?

• Season-long array of color with little input each year
  • Compared to shrubs
  • Compared to annuals
• Less mowing
• Therapeutic

Benefits

• Sensory stimulation
• Improving memory and concentration
• Easing emotional pain from abuse or bereavement
• Reducing physical pain

More Benefits

• Teaching responsibility
• Reducing stress and anger
• Enhancing productivity and problem solving
• Re-employment for people with disabilities

Essential elements of low maintenance perennials

• Hardy in your USDA zone
• Tolerates local summer conditions without supplement care
• Do not require special soil type/pH
• Light requirements appropriate for location

Other elements of low maintenance perennials

• Long-lived, infrequent division (3–5 yr)
• Not aggressive - spreading
• Very little input for care (no staking, DH)
• Withstands summer heat & occasional drought
• Slow growing and long bloom period
• Leaves attractive even when not blooming
**Armeria maritima**  
*Sea Pink, Common Thrift, Sea Thrift*

- Height: 3–12 in.
- Light: FS
- Flower: Spring
- Zone: 4–8
- Other: ribbed, linear leaves.
  - Small head of flowers, 1-in diameter.
  - Best in dry, infertile soils.
  - Moist, fertile soils cause rots.
  - Slow growing clump.
  - Prop. by seed, division.

**Arisaema triphyllum**  
*Jack-in-the-Pulpit, Indian Turnip*

- Height: 1–2 ft
- Light: PS - Shade
- Flower: Spring
- Zone: 4–9
- Other: needs moist soil.
  - Poisonous except for roots/tubers.
  - Propagate by seed - 3 yr to flower.
  - Red berries during early fall.

**Amsonia tabernaemontana**  
*Blue Star Flower*

- Height: 1–3 ft.
- Light: FS – PS (less flwrs)
- Flower: Spring
- Zone: 3(4)–9
- Other: alt., shiny, willow-like leaves.
  - Loose, terminal cluster of star flowers.
  - Fuzzy buds
  - Stems tinged with red.
  - Best in moist soil, tolerates drought.
  - Milky sap may cause skin irritation.
  - Propagate by seed.

**Asarum canadense**  
*Canadian Wild Ginger*

- Height: 6–12 in.
- Light: PS - Sh
- Flower: Mid–late Spr
- Zone: 4–8
- Other: hairy, heart-shaped, evergreen leaves.
  - Purple-brown cup-shaped flowers (no petals).
  - Good ground cover.
  - Milky sap may cause skin irritation.
  - Best in moist, high OM soil.
  - Used by Native Americans to treat various ailments.
  - Propagate division (rhizomes).

**Baptisia australis**  
*False Indigo, Blue Indigo*

- Height: 3–4 ft.
- Light: FS – PS
- Flower: M.–L. Spring
- Zone: 3–9
- Other: 3-leaflet cmpd leaves.
  - Long, terminal, erect raceme of flowers.
  - Black pods are used in dried arrangements.
  - May need staking if grown in PS.
  - Slow growing, rarely need to divide.
  - Propagate by division, seed (hard seedcoat).

**Brunnera macrophylla**  
*Siberian Bugloss, False Forget-me-not*

- Height: 12–18 in.
- Light: PS - Sh
- Flower: Spring
- Zone: 3–8
- Alt. heart-shaped leaves at base, oblong & pointed on flower stalk.
  - Small 5-petal blue flwrs on raceme.
  - New cvs w/ showy leaves.
  - Divide when clump center deteriorates (short rhizomes).
  - Propagate seed, division, root cuttings (self seeds-species).
**Dicentra eximia/ D. formosa**
*Fringed Bleeding-heart, Plume Bleeding-heart*
- Height: 12–18 in.
- Light: PS (PS water reg.)
- Flower: L Spr – M Sum
- Zone: 3–9
- Other: fern-like, gray-blue leaves (ternately cmpd).
- Heart-shaped flowers on branched raceme.
- Flowering period is much longer than spectab.
- Doesn’t go dormant, cut flower.
- Propagate by seed, division, root cuttings.

**Epimedium alpinum**
*Alpine Barrenroot*
- Height: 6–10 in
- Light: PS – Sh
- Flower: Spring
- Zone: 4–7
- Other: best growth in rich, moist soil.
- Loose panicle of red sepal and yellow petal flowers.
- Groundcover.
- Tolerates drought once established.
- Propagate by division.

**Iris sibirica**
*Siberian Iris*
- Height: 2–4 ft (few cvs. 12–18”)
- Light: FS – PS
- Flower: L Spr.
- Zone: 3–9
- Other: best growth in fertile, moist soil.
- Blooms after G. iris & before J. iris – no beard.
- Divide in the spring.
- Less suscept. to iris borer or soft rot.
- Cut back to 6 “ in the fall.

**Mertensia virginica**
*Virginia bluebells*
- Height: 1–2 ft.
- Light: PS – Sh
- Flower: Spring
- Zone: 3–8
- Other: alt., oval, smooth lvs.
- Nodding cluster of trumpet-shaped, blue flowers.
- Pinkish flower buds turn blue.
- Best in moist, rich soils.
- Goes dormant in summer.
- Propagate by seed or division.

**Phlox subulata**
*Moss Phlox, Moss Pink, Ground Pink*
- Height: 3–6 in.
- Light: FS
- Flower: E – Mid Spring
- Zone: 3–9
- Other: small, stiff, linear lvs.
- Dense terminal panicle of 5-lobed flowers.
- Spider mite & rust problem?
- Best – cut back foliage ½ way after flowering.
- Propagate by layering, division, stem cuttings.

**Phlox stolonifera**
*Creeping Phlox*
- Height: 6–12 in.
- Light: PS - Sh
- Flower: E–Mid Spring
- Zone: 3–9
- Other: opp. oval leaves.
- Dense terminal panicle of 5- unnotched flowers.
- Spreads by stolons.
- Best in PShand moist soil.
- Propagate by division or stem cuttings.
**Podophyllum peltatum**
Mayapple

- Height: 1–1.5 ft.
- Light: PS – Sh
- Flower: Spring
- Zone: 3–8
- Other: 1-2, deeply-divided, palmate-lobed, umbrella-like lvs.
- Single, nodding, waxy, white flwr.
- Plants with 1 leaf will not flower.
- Edible, fleshy fruit turns golden when ripe.
- Leaves & roots poisonous.
- Tolerates dry, drought soils.
- Goes dormant in summer.
- Propagate by seed or division.

---

**Pulsatilla vulgaris**
Pasque Flower

- Height: 10–12 in.
- Light: FS – PS
- Flower: E.–Mid Spring
- Zone: 4–8
- Other: hairy, tri-pinnately divided leaves.
- Solitary, cup-shaped flwrs.
- Clematis-like seed heads.
- Root rot in poorly drained soils.
- Fairly drought tolerant in cooler climates.
- Propagate by seed, division, root cuttings.

---

**Sanguinaria canadensis**
Bloodroot

- Height: 6–10 in
- Light: PS – Sh
- Flower: Spring
- Zone: 3–8
- Other: best growth in rich, well-drained soil.
- Flower blooms as the palmate, lobed leaf unfurls.
- Flower closes at night.
- All parts exude bright red-orange sap when cut.
- Goes dormant late summer.
- Propagate by division.

---

**Smilacina racemosa**
False Solomon’s Seal

- Height: 2–3 ft.
- Light: PS – light Sh
- Flower: L.Spr.–E.Sum.
- Zone: 3–7
- Other: alt., mostly sessile leaves.
- White panicle of flowers becomes red berries.
- Thrives in shaded, moist soils.
- Propagate by seed or division.

---

**Achillea filipendulina**
Fernleaf Yarrow

- Height: 3–4 ft.
- Light: FS
- Flower: L. Spring–M. Summer
- Zone: 3–8
- Other:1–2 pin divided fern-like lvs.
- Dense, cmpd, convex yellow corymb.
- May require staking if not sunny & dry.
- Deer & rabbit resistant.
- Cut/dried flower – cut before pollen develops.
- Numerous hybrids – rebloom, shorter, sturdier.
- Prop by seed, division, stem cuttings.

---

**Alchemilla mollis**
Lady’s Mantle

- Height: 8–18 in.
- Light: FS – PS
- Flower: L Spr - E. Sum
- Zone: 4–7
- Other: blue-green, fuzzy almost cylindrical leaves.
- Airy panicle of small yellow, petal-less flowers.
- Doesn’t like wet feet or compacted soil.
- Crown rot when nights are warm & humid.
- Flower used as cut-flower.
- Propagate by seed, division.
**Andropogon gerardii**  
Big Bluestem, Turkey Foot, Beard Grass

- Height: 3–10 ft.
- Light: FS - PS
- Flower: Fall
- Zone: 4–9
- Other: bird’s foot – like seedheads.
  - Stem turns blue-purple as matures.
  - Propagate by division (bunch type), seed.
  - Used by Native Americans for indigestion.
  - Native grass for wetlands and dry prairies.

**Aruncus dioicus**  
Goat’s Beard

- Height: 4–6 ft.
- Light: FS – PS (FS if cool summers)
- Flower: E. Summer
- Zone: 3–7
- Alt, pinnate cmpd leaves.
  - Dense, small, white flowers on large panicles.
  - Male plants have showier flowers
  - Prop by seed, division.
  - Var. astilboides: miniature selection 18 to 24” tall.

**Bouteloua curtipendula**  
Side Oats Grama

- Culture: Native, warm-season grass, drought resistant, adapts to a wide range of conditions; FS.
- Habit: Clump grass, 1 ½–2 ½ ft tall.
- Season of bloom: July-frost; purple-tinted, erect flowers.
- Utilization: Groundcover, massing and in meadows.

**Bouteloua gracilis**  
Blue Grama

- Culture: Native, warm-season grass, tolerant of extreme cold and heat. Prefers loamy or sandy soils; FS.
- Habit: Fine-textured, clump grass, 8-24 in tall. Flowers may reach 12 in above the plant.
- Season of bloom: Mid to late summer until frost. Flowers attached to the stem at right angles; resemble tiny combs or mosquito larvae.
- Utilization: Rock gardens, naturalized areas and as a turfgrass.

**Calamagrostis acutiflora**  
Feather Reed Grass

- Height: 4–5 ft
- Light: FS
- Flower: E. Sum
- Zone: 4–8
- Other: does well along water (damp/wet).
  - Does ok in heavy soil.
  - One of the first orn. grasses to flower.
  - Spring division-sterile seeds.

**Geranium sanguineum**  
Bloodred Geranium

- Height: 6–12 in.
- Light: FS – PS
- Flower: L. Spr–E. Sum
- Zone: 3–8
- Other: cylindrical lvs - lobes.
  - Solitary, axillary, 5-petal flowers.
  - Foliage turns red after first hard frost.
  - Prefers moist, rich soils - spreads.
  - Buy sterile cvs: John Elsley’.
  - Propagate by division, tip cuttings.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plant Name</th>
<th>Common Names</th>
<th>Height</th>
<th>Light</th>
<th>Flower</th>
<th>Zone</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Echinacea purpurea</td>
<td>Purple Coneflower, Black Sampson, Snakeroot</td>
<td>2–4 ft.</td>
<td>FS–PS</td>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>3–8</td>
<td>Dark green, toothed, rough leaves. Large daisy-like flowers w/ drooping rays. Leaf spot &amp; J. beetle may be problematic. Drought tolerant. Propagate by root cuttings, division.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Rudbeckia fulgida**
*Orange Coneflower*

- Height: 15–30 in.
- Light: FS – PS
- Flower: Mid Sum – Fall
- Zone: 3–9
- Other: dark green, ovate, 3-veined basal leaves.
- Daisy-like flowers w/ black discs.
- Short rhizomes form large clump.
- P. mildew - NOT a problem.
- Propagate by division, term. cuttings, seed.

**Hemerocallis spp.**
*Daylily (http://www.daylilies.org/)*

- Height: 1–4 ft.
- Light: FS–PS (PS best for pastel colors)
- Flower: E. Sum – M. Fall (some rebloomers)
- Zone: 3–10
- Long, slender, fountain-like leaves.
- Trumpet-shaped flowers, singles & double.
- Most are diurnal.
- Dormant and evergreen types.
- Propagate by seed, division.

**Hosta**
*Plantain lily  PS – Sh Z: 3–8
Hostaphotos:http://www.hostalibrary.org/index.html*

**Nepeta spp.**
*Catmint, Catnip*

- Height: 1–4 ft.
- Light: FS - PS
- Flower: E. Summer
- Zone: 4–8
- Other: opp., gray-green lvs.
- Square stems, all aromatic.
- Flowers grouped in clusters along the spike.
- Deer resistant.
- Shear back halfway mid-sum for repeat blooms.
- Medicinal herb – sedative.
- Propagate by seed, division or terminal cuttings.

**Paeonia hybrids**
*Peony, Chinese Peony, Hybrid Peony*

- Height: 3 ft.
- Light: FS - PS
- Flower: L. Spr - E. Sum
- Zone: 3–8
- Other: biternate, entire or lobed leaves.
- Large, fragrant, flowers (single, dbl, anem).
- Too shaded or deep planting inhibits flowering.
- Tree root compet. or late freeze inhib. flowering.
- Blight–sanitation (1˚ dbls).
- Propagate by division, seed (5–7 yr to flower).

**Platycodon grandiflorus**
*Balloon Flower*

- Height: 18–36 in.
- Light: FS - PS
- Flower: Summer
- Zone: 3–8
- Other: pointed oval, shiny, toothed leaves.
- Star-shaped terminal flowers.
- Doesn’t tolerate wet soil.
- Very slow to emerge in the Spring.
- Propagate by seed, division (difficult).
**Perovskia atriplicifolia**  
*Russian Sage, Azure Sage*  
- Height: 3–4 ft.  
- Light: FS  
- Flower: Summer  
- Zone: 3–8  
- Other: gray-white, strongly dissected leaves.  
- 2-lipped flowers on spike above foliage.  
- Plant base is woody, cut back to 3-4" in spring.  
- Tolerant of dry soils.  
- Prop by seed, tip cuttings.  

**Salvia x superba**  
*Perennial Salvia, Hardy Sage*  
- Height: 2–3 ft.  
- Light: FS  
- Flower: Summer  
- Zone: 3–8  
- Other: opposite, hairy, leaves – sessile on stem.  
- Spike-like raceme of violet flowers.  
- Prefers well-drained, moist soils.  
- Cool evenings prolong flowering & ↑ intensity.  
- Tolerant of drought.  
- Prop by div & stem cuttings.  

**Schizachyrium scoparium**  
*Little Bluestem*  
- Culture: Native, warm-season grass, tolerates any soil except boggy, wet or mucky; FS.  
- Habit: Upright, slightly rhizomatous, clump grass; 2–4 ft tall. Foliage turns crimson in autumn.  
- Season of bloom: Flower spikes bearing fluffy plumes from August through September.  
- Utilization: Specimen, accent, grouping and massing.  

**Sorghasturm nutans**  
*Indian Grass*  
- Culture: Native, warm-season, drought tolerant, prefers moist loam; FS.  
- Habit: Upright, clumping. produces foliage 5–7 ft tall.  
- Season of bloom: Stiff, erect spikes bearing tan panicles 2–3 ft above foliage in late summer.  
- Utilization: Naturalized areas, massing and accent plantings.  

**Chasmanthium latifolium**  
*Sea Oats, Spangle Grass, Indian Woodoats*  
- Height: 30–36 in.  
- Light: FS – PS: darker green/taller  
- Flower: L. Sum – Fall  
- Zone: 6–8  
- Other: 0.5–1” wide, smooth grass blades.  
- Flat green spikelets on long, drooping panicles.  
- Seedhead turns red-brown & persists in winter.  
- Used in dried arrangements.  
- Tends to self-seed.  
- Propagate by seed, division.  

**Chelone glabra**  
*Turtlehead*  
- Height: 2–3 ft.  
- Light: PS  
- Flower: Early Fall  
- Zone: 3–8  
- Other: dark green leaves.  
- Snapdragon-like flowers.  
- Black pods are used in dried arrangements.  
- Best in moist, rich soil.  
- Attracts butterflies.  
- Pinch stems in spring to reduce height.  
- Propagate by division, seed or cuttings.
**Liatris spicata**  
Spike Gay-feather, Blazing Star, Button Snakeroot

- Height: 1.5–3 ft.
- Light: FS – PS
- Flower: M. Sum–L. Fall
- Zone: 3–9
- Linear basal leaves.
- Spike w/ 25–50 flowers matures from top down.
- Excellent cut/dried flower.
- Intolerable of wet soil during late fall/winter.
- Propagate by seed (2 yr), division (corm).

**Sedum spectabile**  
Showy Stonecrop Sedum, Live-Forever

- Height: 1.5–2 ft.
- Light: FS – PS
- Flower: L. Sum–L. Fall
- Zone: 3–10
- Other: fleshy, spoon-shaped leaves.
- Dense terminal cyme.
- Likes well-drained soils.
- Dead flower stalks attractive during winter.
- Grows in dry soil.
- Attractive during winter.
- Propagate by stem cuttings, division.