

August 16, 2015

Garden Column
Blooming Parade

Flowers always make people feel better, happier, and more helpful; they are sunshine, food and medicine for the soul. - Luther Burbank.

A garden changes from day to day. Each day is different and that's one of the joys of gardening; the anticipation of what has changed, what buds have formed or opened into a colorful bloom.

Flowers give immediate satisfaction but also a lasting appreciation of their beauty. However, eventually, blooms fade leaving only foliage. Gardens, without blooming flowers, are like novels with an obvious plot, predictable and dull. Flowers bloom for a definite time. But eventually all lose their "blush". However, like a parade, with a sequence of floats, bands, tractors, fire engines, and clowns, a garden can be a parade of blooms throughout the growing season.

Following are some of my favorite flowers that "parade" their blooms throughout the growing season. Most can be found in well tended pots at Bloomers Garden Center and Landscaping and planted yet this year or put on a "to do" list for 2016.

Some of the earliest flowers are tulips, daffodils, crocuses, forget-me-nots, and lily of the valley. Their blooms are transient almost to the point of being ephemeral and how many photos have been taken of snow on tulips. However, spring has finally arrived when bleeding hearts and columbines begin to bloom. Bleeding hearts will continue blooming from May until into June and even July. Columbines have a relatively short bloom period that begins sometime in May and but also may continue into mid June.

In June the iris family blooms. Crested iris, bearded iris, Siberian iris, and flag iris bloom one to two weeks. The heights vary tremendously from the tall flag irises to the small crested iris. The vertical forms of the taller irises form an interesting contrast to the rounded forms of other plants. Also During this time, bergenia, an under used plant for this area, blooms, sending up clusters of delicate pinkish blooms on stipes. The broad leaves have a tropical appearance and seem somewhat out of place in a northern garden. However, the unusual texture compliments the forms of other flowers.

Other plants that bloom in June are balloon flowers, cranesbills, the different spurges, gas plant, poppies, lupines, goats beard, double crested bellflowers, false indigo or false lupine, and peonies to name a few. The different cranesbills start early in June and continue blooming right into July and later, depending on the variety. Peonies, bloom for about a week or so but by planting different varieties the bloom period can be extended until the end of June.

Every gardener should have a goats beard plant in the middle or back of their sunny garden. A big, robust and dominating plant that sends out myriads of "lacey" blooms that last for weeks. Even after blooming, the spent blooms lend an interesting texture to the garden.

False indigo is a wonderful showy plant during this time. A plant in the legume family, the blue or yellow flowers, form pods that add interest to any garden. The compound leaves also add an interesting texture.

Double crested bellflowers have a vibrant purple bloom that attracts attention from a distance. The blooms last for almost two

weeks, sometimes into July then, the Cinderella effect. The plants change from the stunning flower child into a dowdy brownish-green heap that flops over it's neighbors. No problem. Cut them back and the plants may bloom again in the same year but certainly will put on another show the following year.

July 4th and what's blooming? Plenty! The different mallows, Maltese cross, Asian lilies, delphiniums, false sunflowers, coneflowers, Shasta daisies, phlox, beard tongue, Lysmachia, and gooseneck to name a few. The list goes on and on.

Phlox. The name means flame in Greek, is a genus of 67 different species that will bloom throughout July and well into August. This genus produces a variety of colors primarily in purple, pink and white and brightens the garden for several weeks. One of my favorite plants, delphinium, may begin blooming in June, depending on the variety, but reaches it's blooming apex in July. It's a good idea to have tall cages around the plants to prevent their collapse during a rain or wind storm as the stems are hollow and do not support heavy weight.

Going into August and the garden seems to be just getting started. At this time daylilies, false sunflowers, coneflowers, monardas, obedient plant, Chinese lantern, rocket plants, groundsel and hostas are blooming or getting ready to do so. Many people are not fond of hostas as a blooming flower, liking them more for their foliage. However many varieties have a beautiful, but subtle, vertical bloom. A complement to the garden, especially in the shadier areas.

Rocket plant is a striking, tall plant that forms a showy spike of yellow blooms. A good plant for the shady or semi shady part of the garden. Groundsel or summer ragwort is related to rocket plant but looks nothing like it. It forms beautiful huge "purplish" leaves that seem more appropriate growing in the jungle. It too forms yellow flowers but in attractive and subtle clumps instead of a spike.

Daylillies are often called the perfect perennial flower. There are literally hundreds of varieties in hundreds of colors. They are tough, drought resistant, disease resistant, insect resistant, but alas, not always deer resistant. Bloom begins usually in late July and continues until the end of August, depending on variety.

Middle to late August and into September, Labor Day and the start of school. Some hollyhocks will be blooming, but the stars of the "bloomers" during this time will be turtlehead, gay feather, sea holly, sedum, globe thistle, and, of course, asters. Turtleheads form pristine, dark green, toothed leaves that seem to be impervious to all diseases and insects. The pale purple blooms vary but usually start blooming about the middle of August and well into September.

Asters are the last bloomers in Minnesota that extend to the end of the growing season in October. There are over 180 different species so you have a lot to pick from.

Plant your own parade!