

Perennials for Spring Interest

Spring is such an amazing time of year, especially for those of us living in Minnesota. After months of snow and cold, all of the plants and flowers that emerge in spring are more than welcome. As the weather warms, the snow melts and the days get longer, you can start pulling back any winter mulch you may have used. Don't remove it all at once and don't take it too far away in case we get a hard frost warning. When it gets warmer, make sure any stems or foliage left from last year are cleaned up, being careful not to damage any newly emerging growth. This may sound like work, but it really is an excuse to get out into the garden where you will be delighted by the incredible day-to-day changes. Exactly when a spring perennial emerges and blooms will depend on the exact variety of plant, where it is planted and the type of winter and spring weather we are experiencing.

How Soon Will It Happen?

Some varieties naturally emerge from ground that may not even be fully thawed. Many other plants will soon begin putting out their foliage and a few varieties will wait so long to show any signs of life that you may think they didn't survive the winter. Most landscapes also offer several *micro-climates*, small areas that are slightly colder or warmer than average. For instance, an area along the south side of a dark brick home may be a half zone warmer because of the shelter and the heat-retaining quality of the brick. On average, we can expect to see most of the snow gone by April and a few plants emerging. Even though it feels warm to us after the long, cold winter, we still experience lots of cold nights well into May. We aren't usually frost free until most of May has passed. Just how early or late our spring arrives and how quickly or slowly the soil warms will influence when our spring perennials will make their debuts.

Blooms and Foliage

While blooms may be the showiest part of spring, don't overlook all the plants with interesting foliage. Since foliage stays all season while the flowers are fleeting, the appearance of the foliage is very important. Look at the shape and size of the leaves as well as their texture and structure. The overall shape and size of the plant can also play an important role in the garden.

When selecting perennials for their bloom, try to imagine what else will be blooming or what other foliage plants will be nearby to complement the flowers. Perennials are wonderful, but their strength is their ability to come back year after year. In exchange for this virtue, we must give up the constant blooms we can expect from annuals. The duration of bloom on a perennial varies greatly. Some are very fleeting lasting only a few days. Most bloom for 2-3 weeks and a few will bloom for a month or so.

Spring Ephemerals

There is a group of early plants that are classified as spring ephemerals. They emerge, bloom and disappear, foliage and all, within such a short amount of time that they are usually gone before mid-summer, giving them a truly magical quality. The magnificent Oriental poppies do this, but most are wildflowers that have developed this ability to come up in a wooded area and complete most of their life cycle before the deciduous trees fully leaf out creating shade. Some of the nicest spring ephemerals are May apple, bloodroot, and Virginia bluebells. Enjoy their beauty early in the growing season and let other plants take their place later.

Spring Blooming Perennials

Lady's Mantle *Alchemilla mollis*
Monkshood *Aconitum*
Lenten Rose *Helleborus*
Columbine *Aquilegia*
Virginia Bluebells *Mertensia*
Trillium *Trillium*
Globe Flower *Trollius*
Sweet Woodruff *Gallium odoratum*
Cushion Spurge *Euphorbia polychrome*
Rock Cress *Aubrietia*
Pasque Flower *Anemone pulsatilla*
Bearberry *Arctostaphylos*
Jack in the Pulpit *Arisaema triphyllum*
Creeping Phlox *Phlox subulata*
Thrift *Armeria*
Wild Ginger *Asarum*
Bergenia *Bergenia*
Brunnera *Brunnera*
Bellflower *Campunula, some varieties*
Sweet William *Dianthus barbatus*
Pinks *Dianthus, various species*
Bleeding Heart *Dicentra*
Shooting Star *Dodecatheon*
Barrenwort *Epimedium*
Wintergreen *Gaultheria procumbens*
Hardy Geraniums, some species *Geranium*
Coral Bells, some species *Heuchera*
Candytuft *Iberis*
Species *Iris Iris*
Iceland Poppy *Papaver nudicaule*
Oriental Poppy *Papaver orientalis*

Woodland Phlox *Phlox stolonifera*
Jacob's Ladder *Polemonium*
Solomon's Seal *Polygonatum*
Primrose, various species *Primula*
Lungwort *Pulmonaria*
Buttercup *Ranunculus*
Meadow Rue *Filipendula*
Foamflower *Tiarella*
Spiderwort *Tradescantia*
Violet, various species, *Viola*
Fairybells *Disporum*
Merrybells or Bellwort *Uvularia*
Lilies of the Valley *Convallaria*
Marsh Marigold *Caltha palustris*

Early Spring Bulbs

Glory of Snow *Chionodoxa*
Crocus *Crocus*
Snowdrops *Galanthus*
Species Tulips *Tulipa*
Daffodils, miniatures *Narcissus*

Mid-season Spring Bulbs

Hyacinths
Tulips
Daffodils
Grape Hyacinths

Late Spring Bulbs

Allium, various species *Allium*
Wood Hyacinths *Scilla*
Dutch Iris *Iris*
Tulips, Lily Flowering