



Horticulture

Perennials with interesting flowers

Sweet potatoes

Sweet potatoes are high in food value. Varieties with deep yellow colored roots are a good source of vitamin A.

Sweet potato varieties are grouped into two general types—those with deep yellow or orange color that are soft, moist and sweet when cooked and those with firm, dry, light-colored, mealy flesh. Important varieties among the soft flesh-type are Centennial, Nemagold and Goldrush.

Being of tropical origin, sweet potatoes require a long warm growing season. Sweet potatoes require a growing season of at least five months where the temperature does not go below 70 degrees F. These

requirements are found in an area south of a line extending through McCook, Grand Island and West Point.

Sweet potatoes are not grown from seed. Plants may be purchased from a greenhouse or garden center. Planting should not be done sooner than the last week of May or later than June 10.

Sweet potatoes should be planted in a ridge to provide drainage and allow for root expansion. Ridges should be about 3 1/2 feet apart with plants set 1 foot apart. Hand weeding will be necessary until the vines completely cover the rows. (DJ)

Gardening for children

This is the time of year when many families are actively working at planning, preparing and planting a garden. What a great activity to get young children involved with. Gardening can provide children with a wide variety of experiences available nowhere else. Gardening is learning. Regardless of the location, the planting and caring of seeds and plants teaches all of us.

Through gardening, children are provided with opportunities to observe nature. This promotes children's curiosity and interest in knowledge. The whole gardening and growing process allows children to learn new words and expand vocabularies, provide opportunities for comparing objects, for example, size, shape and color of seeds, and instill patience and perseverance. Children are frequently

more willing to taste foods which they have helped grow. Gardening may provide new tasting opportunities in addition to the obvious hands on experiences, such as working with seeds, plants, soil and water. Because children learn best by doing and by making their own discoveries, let them actually be a part of the gardening.

With so many families raising gardens, an excellent opportunity exists for children to experience growing food. It is nice for even very young children to have their own special plot. In this age when many of our foods are purchased at the supermarket, it is exciting for children to actually learn where and how foods grow. Planning what to grow is great fun and the children will think the plants they grow are the best ever. (MJM)

Home gardeners can choose from many species and varieties of perennials. Perennials differ in growth habit, size, leaf shape and other characteristics.

Sometimes what sets one perennial apart is its interesting flower. Below is a list of perennials with unusual flowers.

For interesting late spring bloom, try **columbine (Aquilegia hybrids)**. The foliage is blue-green and softly hairy. The flower is composed of five petals and five sepals. The petals have backward projecting spurs. The sepals are shorter than the petals and may be the same color or a contrasting color. Colors for the sepals and petals include red, pink, yellow, blue, white and purple. This plant grows 1 to 3 feet tall by 1 foot wide. It prefers full sun to partial shade and well-drained soil.

Old-fashioned bleeding heart (Dicentra spectabilis) has blue-green foliage. Flowers hang down from arching stems in late spring to early summer. The outer petals are rose-red

with reflexed tips. The inner petals are white. Bleeding heart gets its name from the flowers that resemble pink broken

hearts. This plant grows 2 to 3 feet high with a graceful arching effect and a rounded growth habit. Bleeding heart performs best in well-drained, moist soils in partial shade.

Sea holly (Eryngium amethystinum) has rigid, deeply cut, spiny, silvery foliage. The blue flowers appear in heads

that are 1/2 inch to 3/4 inch in diameter. Long, spear-like bracts surround the heads. Blooms appear in midsummer. Sea holly prefers full sun. This perennial is tolerant of dry, sunny conditions and infertile soils. It can be used as a single specimen or in groups of three. Sea holly can also be used as a dried flower.

To add bright colors to the perennial garden, incorporate specimen plantings of **red-hot poker (Kniphofia hybrids)**. The foliage is linear or sword-shaped, and gray-green with rough edges.

Tubular flowers appear massed in the top 6 to 10 inches of the flower scape in the summer. Flower colors include red, yellow, coral/orange and combinations. The plant has a mature height of 2 to 4 feet and a width of 3 feet. Red-hot poker prefers a site with full sun and well-drained soil. Avoid planting this perennial in heavy, wet soils. The flowers can be used as cut flowers. Mulch heavily in winter.

Beebalm (Monarda didyma) has foliage that is aromatic and stems that are square. Two- to three-inch, tubular flowers occur in dense heads from late spring to summer. Deadheading promotes new blooms.

This plant grows to a height of 2 to 4 feet with a spread of 3 feet.

Beebalm prefers full sun and good soil moisture. If beebalm is to be used in the perennial bed, divide plants every 2 to 3 years as it spreads rapidly. Beebalm can be used in naturalized areas and to attract bees and butterflies.

For late summer bloom, try **obedient plant (Physostegia virginiana)**. The spear-like, serrated leaves are green in the growing season. The stems are square. The flowers appear in spikes spaced in four vertical

rows. Flower colors include rose, purple and white. The plant grows to a height of 2 to 4 feet and a width of 3 feet. The ideal site includes sun to partial shade and moist soils. Because of its height, staking may be required. The obedient plant spreads vigorously. The obedient plant requires little or no fertilizer. Heavy fertilization promotes rampant growth and increases the plant's invasive tendencies. Obedient plant is heat tolerant. The bloom may be used as a cut flower. Obedient plant gets its name from the ability of individual flowers to be twisted on the stem and then remain as arranged.

Balloon flower (Platycodon grandiflorus) has serrated, dark green leaves that are 1 to 3 inches long with short petioles. The saucer-shaped flowers appear in summer in lavender, blue, pink and white. Several double-flowering varieties are available. The plant has 2 to 3 foot upright growth. Balloon flower prefers sun to part shade and well-drained soil. The plant does well as a cut flower, in rock gardens and in perennial beds.

For the perennial border, try **pincushion flower (Scabiosa caucasica)**. For 3 to 4 weeks in the summer, light blue or pink, flattened flower heads appear on long stems.

Cultivars such as 'Butterfly blue' and 'Pink mist' can bloom for 2 months. The flower head consists of an outer ring of flattened petals and a tufted, cushion-like center. The shape of the flower gives pincushion flower its name. Plants are 1 1/2 to 2 feet tall and 1 1/2 feet wide with a rounded growth habit. Full sun and well-drained, fertile soil are necessary for optimum growth. To promote flowering, spent blooms should be removed. For the best effect, plant this perennial in the perennial bed in groups of three or more. In addition, the blooms can be used as cut flowers. (MJM)

1999 May/June Garden Calendar



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1
2	3 Apply fungicide to pines for tip blight	4 Control euonymus scale	5 Apply preventive fungicide to bluegrass	6	7 Check pines for sawfly	8
9 Average date of last frost	10 Control billbugs in bluegrass	11 Put out rain gauge	12 Apply fungicide to pines for needle blight	13 Plant wildflower seeds	14	15 Plant buffalo-grass
16	17	18	19 Plant gladiolus bulbs	20 Fertilize zoysiagrass	21 Plant cannas	22
23	24	25	26 Plant warm season transplants	27	28	29
30	31	1 Power rake zoysiagrass	2	3	4	5
6	7 Plug zoysiagrass	8	9 Watch for cabbage worms	10	11	12
13	14 Control apple maggot	15	16 Apply fungicide to pines for needle blight	17 Prune spring flowering bulbs	18	19 Check bluegrass for sod web worm
20	21 Control bagworms	22 Fertilize buffalograss	23 Watch for bean leaf beetle	24 Check roses for black spot	25 take softwood cuttings to start plants	26
27	28 Watch for squash vine borer	29	30			



Many of us need reminders. That is the purpose of this calendar. Check the calendar each month and follow the recommendations if they are necessary in your landscape situation. (MJM)

