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20 Easy Plants for Fuss-Free Gardens



aster

Aster spp. • Zones 3 to 8

With more than 250 varieties available, you're bound to find a cultivar that's suited to your space. The extensive range of sizes and colors available—purple, red, pink and white—makes this plant one of the most popular for late-season blooms.

As gardeners, we are constantly faced with challenges: plants that won't bloom, flowers that die after a late-spring frost, droughts that wipe out entire beds. Gardening definitely has its fair share of difficulties, so every once in a while it's nice to have plants that require minimal maintenance. For the most part, these top picks are hardy, trouble-free and suitable for nearly any North American backyard.



Daylily

Hemerocallis • Zones 3 to 10.

This summer bloomer is cherished for its reliability and variety. With many thousands of cultivars available, gardeners have almost limitless options. Though the blossoms last just a day, you'll find many hybrids that flower repeatedly all season long.



Bee Balm

Monarda • Zones 3 to 9

This flower's unusual shape makes it a standout. Shades of purple, red, pink and white not only add brilliant color to the garden, but also attract butterflies and hummingbirds. For extra ease, choose mildew-resistant Marshall's Delight or Jacob Cline.



Peony

Paeonia • Zones 3 to 9

A peony's fresh, heady scent simply can't be beat. In late spring, bushy plants burst with lush, showy purple, white, red, yellow and pink blooms that make this flower a favorite choice to use in colorful beds and bouquets.

Yarrow

Achillea • Zones 3 to 9

These easygoing, long-lasting flowers come into their own once the days are consistently warm. Suited to most growing conditions, yarrow provides a long season of bloom all the way through to fall. Avoid aggressive varieties.



gardener's secret

Cosmos is easy to grow from seed. For just a few bucks, you can create a gorgeous show in a single season.

cosmos

Cosmos spp. • grown as an annual

If big, beautiful flowers are a top priority for your garden, cosmos is perfect for you. This vibrant bloomer stands 1 to 6 feet high and produces colorful cup- or saucer-shaped blossoms from summer long into fall. Its feathery foliage is also attractive. Cosmos does well in a wide variety of conditions, making it a garden must-have.

why we love it

In addition to classic shades, coral bells' foliage come in some unusual colors, such as black, silver, amber and even bronze.



coral bells

Heuchera • Zones 3 to 9

Coral bells' tall, airy flower spikes rise elegantly above mounds of evergreen foliage that comes in a rainbow of colors. This plant works especially well in borders and containers, thriving in sun or shade.



Sunflower

Helianthus annuus • annual

There's something about a sunflower's bright face that makes you feel good. And when it comes to kids, there are few plants that draw more "oohs" and "aahs" than these towering blooms, which can soar up to 15 feet! The centers are composed of tiny, nectar-producing flower clusters that attract butterflies and hummingbirds. Flowers range from red to yellow to white.



California Poppy

Eschscholzia californica •

grown as an annual
Sweeping across the arid foothills and valleys west of the Sierra Nevada, a sea of golden-orange California poppies lights up the landscape each spring. The delicate, nodding blooms are ideal in rock and cottage gardens, rather than in formal flower beds. Just be ready to do some deadheading to limit reseeding opportunities.



Yucca

Yucca filamentosa • Zones 4 to 11
There's a good reason that so many Southwestern gardeners use yucca as a backyard centerpiece. It's about as drought-tolerant as they come. In addition, it boasts beautiful white flowers on a tall stem that shoots up from a hearty mound of spiky evergreen leaves.



Pansy

Viola x wittrockiana • Zones 4 to 8
This colorful flower is best known for the whiskered "faces" that mark many of the blooms. The majority of pansy varieties are annuals, though some live longer. Most perform best in cooler weather; so in many warm climates, some cultivars are used as delightful winter annuals.



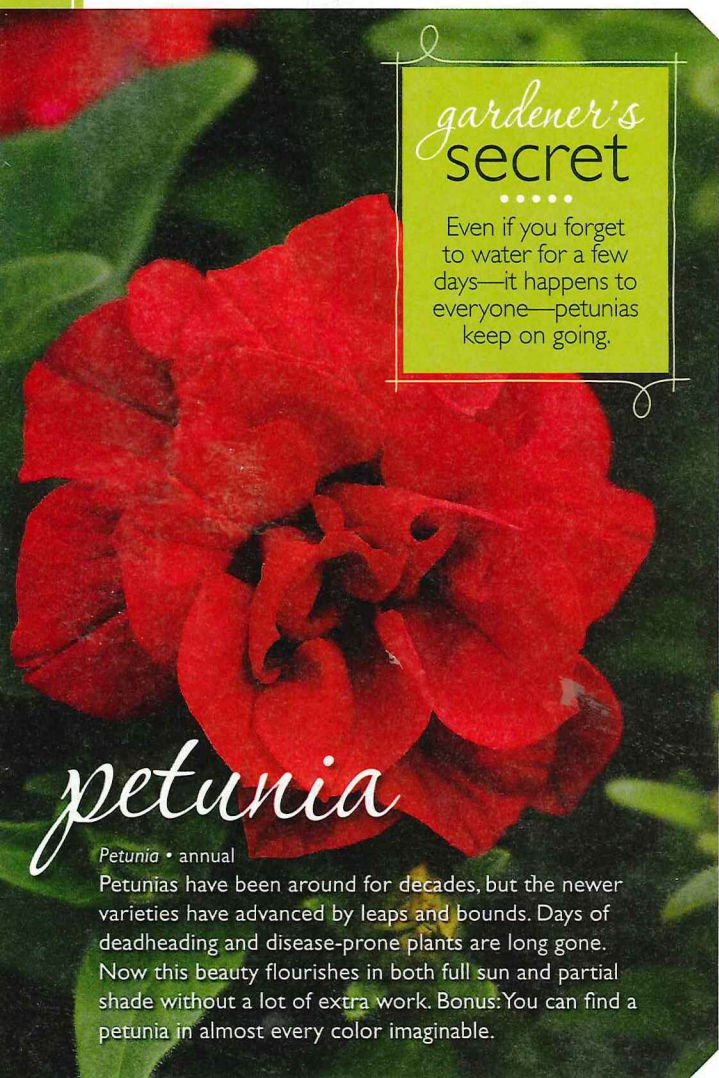
Nasturtium

Tropaeolum • annual
This cheerful flower thrives on neglect. Once it's established, the nasturtium performs best when left alone, providing vivid color from spring through frost. Some types have compact, mounded growing habits, while others are good climbers. This flower also makes a zesty addition to a green salad.



Coneflower

Echinacea spp. • Zones 3 to 9
Its easygoing nature has made the coneflower a garden staple for many generations. Growing 2 to 3 feet high and 2 feet wide, this colorful bloomer is the perfect companion plant in just about any garden. It does require well-draining soil, but it will thrive in full sun as well as partial shade.



gardener's secret

Even if you forget to water for a few days—it happens to everyone—petunias keep on going.

petunia

Petunia • annual

Petunias have been around for decades, but the newer varieties have advanced by leaps and bounds. Days of deadheading and disease-prone plants are long gone. Now this beauty flourishes in both full sun and partial shade without a lot of extra work. Bonus: You can find a petunia in almost every color imaginable.



Hosta

Hosta • Zones 3 to 8

The ultimate low-care shade plant, hosta comes in endless varieties and colors. It also can be easily divided—perfect for the budget-minded. Hosta forms a dense, leafy clump, with blossoms rising up to 3 feet above the foliage. Thousands of cultivars offer a wide array of leaf colors, shapes, patterns and textures. While some hostas tolerate sun, those grown in partial shade generally produce the most handsome, longest-lasting foliage.

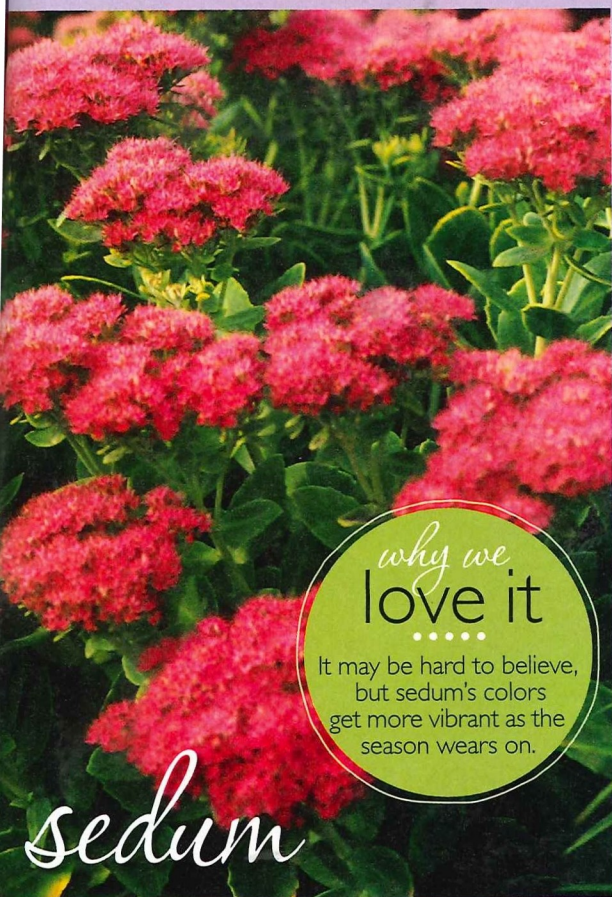


Zinnia

Zinnia • annual

With new heat-, drought- and disease-resistant plants on the market, there's never been a better time to grow zinnias. This annual grows up to 3 feet high, with blooms that last until the first frost.

HOSTA: SETH H. SERRAN; ZINNIA: BILLY FEENEY; PETUNIA: JEFFREY M. COOPER; YUCCA: JEFFREY M. COOPER; PANSY: MARY ZIMMERMAN; NASTURTIUM: FLOWERSINTEBACCO.COM; ECHINEACEA: COLLEEN VINCE; TROPAEOLUM: UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS; VIOLA: JEFFREY M. COOPER



why we
love it

It may be hard to believe, but sedum's colors get more vibrant as the season wears on.

sedum

Sedum spp. • Zones 3 to 10

Take a close look and you'll see this plant's flower heads are made up of little star-shaped blooms. Since the plants range from 3 inches to 3 feet high, some species work well as ground covers, while others make excellent border plants.



Impatiens

Impatiens • annual in most zones
Reliable impatiens are shade-garden favorites throughout North America, and quickly grow to fill in bare areas with undulating mounds of color. Once planted, impatiens need very little care. Plants bloom from spring to first frost and, unlike some other annuals, require no deadheading.



Lambs' Ears

Stachys byzantina • Zones 4 to 8
Easily recognized by its woolly silvery-gray foliage, lambs' ears is a trusty bedding plant and ground cover that also makes a wonderful companion plant. Standing about 18 inches tall, lambs' ears thrives in full sun to partial shade. You can't go wrong with its long growing season: early summer to frost.

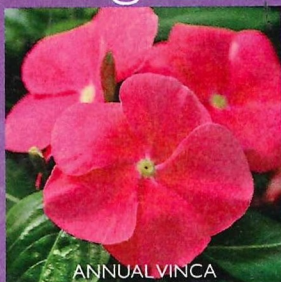


Siberian Iris

Iris sibirica • Zones 3 to 9
An easy-care garden staple, Siberian iris produces white or jewel-toned flowers that can be planted in formal flower beds or naturalized for a more rustic look. Just be sure to plant it in moist soil.

no-deadheading zone

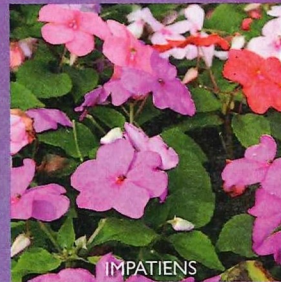
With these low-maintenance annuals, you will have lots of time to sit back and enjoy your garden retreat.



ANNUAL VINCA



FLOWERING TOBACCO



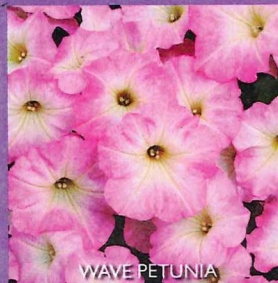
IMPATIENS



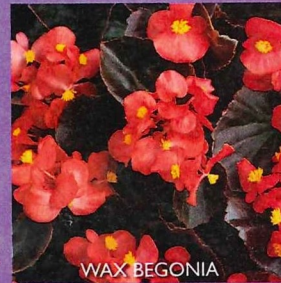
MELAMPODIUM



SWEET ALYSSUM



WAVE PETUNIA



WAX BEGONIA