

GROWERTALKS

Inside Look

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Playing the Perennials Game

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If you've been paying attention to this page, you'll know that I tend to lean toward low-maintenance gardening.

None of the annuals and vegetables I grow are put in the ground—I have lots of containers and baskets on and around my patio filled with flowering annuals, vegetables and potted plants. I don't have as many as the Beytes household, but it's enough that my husband said, "You got a lot goin' on out here," after I was done planting everything this spring.

Now, don't think the rest of my yard is a barren wasteland. Quite the contrary. What I do have planted in mass beds in the ground is perennials. During the last 10 years or so, I've turned my perennial gardens into a game of sorts. I have two sun perennial beds with everything from echinacea to anemone; a shade bed with Japanese ferns, heucheras and hostas; and a small rose garden (are they

considered perennials? Or shrubs? Or perennial shrubs?). Every spring, the game begins with trying to figure out what survived the latest Chicago winter.

Most years, I do have one or two casualties. I don't count those as losses; rather, they're opportunities. I feel bad for about 10 seconds when I realize one of them didn't make it and I have to rip it out. But then I rub my hands together and start thinking about what I'm going to put in its place.

As a rookie on my perennials garden journey, I was often overwhelmed with self-doubt and angst (Is it my fault it didn't survive? What did I do wrong?!).

I imagine many of our new gardening friends we made during the pandemic may have felt this way after a plant mishap. It shows that no matter what level of gardener you are, there will always be a mix of winning and losing seasons. And like with any game, to really be good at it, you have to practice. Sometimes it takes years to perfect your craft and get your garden exactly how you want it.

The best thing our industry can do is to help everyone who plays in the garden to be as successful as they can be. One of those ways is to continue to innovate in breeding and paying attention to what consumers want for their yards and patios. Our resident shrub and tree expert (and editor of the *Nursery & Landscape Insider* newsletter)

Matthew Chappell spoke with a handful of woody ornamentals breeders to get a gauge for what they're seeing in consumer trends and what new varieties they can look forward to next year.

On the perennials side, we've got the first part of our highlights from the California Summer Trials, which also includes a couple of shrubs, too. Plus, Laura Robles from Walters Gardens runs down a robust list of the best perennial plants for the fall.

On the technical side of things, we've got tips for using PGRs wisely on herbaceous perennials and 10 ways to be better at controlling weeds in the landscape.

Oh, and if you were wondering what my strategy is for playing the perennials garden game, the answer is I have none. I have no rhyme or reason for their placement (besides exposure, of course), so it's very much a hodge-podge of types and textures, and I like it this way. It's all part of my game plan. And like with any game, the key to success is to celebrate the wins humbly and take the losses graciously. **GT**