

GROWERTALKS

Features

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The Best Perennials for Fall

Laura Robles

Heuchera

Heuchera are the perfect fall crop, with fantastic foliage colors that complement other late summer and fall blooming plants. Whether they're used in a combination planter or in a decorative patio pot next to an array of colorful garden mums, the rich orange, black and purple tones scream out fall.

Summer production is fairly straightforward, with a 72-ct liner finishing in a 1-gal. container in eight to 10 weeks. Be sure to provide adequate spacing to help alleviate disease pressure in the dense canopies, and grow under average moisture conditions for the best rooting and growth performance.

Echinacea

Coneflowers bloom naturally in mid to late summer, but are an attractive fall perennial with many available in shades of yellow, orange and red. Fall is also a great time to plant perennials, including echinacea, which will establish and then bloom at their normal time in subsequent years. Seed heads can be left up to provide fall and winter interest, and will also provide food for hungry finches.

Echinacea will finish in a trade gallon (2.5 qt.) container when planted from liners in the late spring or early summer, taking eight to 10 weeks from a 72-ct liner and six to eight weeks from a larger 30-ct liner.

During production, watch for signs of Aster Yellows, which echinacea can get from leafhopper feeding. Symptoms include stunting and greening, or deformed flowers.

Heliopsis

Heliopsis, or False Sunflower, are another fabulous plant for fall. The flowers are available in autumnal shades of yellow, gold and orange, and mix well in harvest-themed combination planters. Heliopsis are also great as cut flowers and attract butterflies.

Plant from 72-ct or 30-ct liners in late spring to early summer, finishing a trade gallon (2.5 qt.) in 10 to 12 and eight to 10 weeks, respectively. Bareroot is also a great method to get a nice full container in a short amount of time, and will finish a 1-gal. container in seven to 10 weeks. Heliopsis grow best in warm temperatures and long-day conditions, so summer production is perfect for this crop!

Anemone

When many other perennials are fading in the garden, Japanese Anemone are just kicking into gear. These graceful

perennials work great in the garden paired with ornamental grasses and fall-blooming sedum.

Japanese Anemone can be planted from liners in late spring for a fall crop, finishing in a trade gallon (2.5 qt.) in 10 to 12 weeks from a 72-ct and six to eight weeks from a larger 20-ct liner. Anemone prefer consistent moisture and long days for flowering. Note that the roots are naturally a brownish-yellow color, so don't panic if you don't see white roots on your crop.

Ornamental grasses

The term "ornamental grasses" encompasses a wide range of genera, including some, such as carex, that aren't even true grasses. Many of them are great fall crops, with ornamental flowers, seed heads and fantastic foliage coloration that's often brought on by the cooler fall temperatures. Panicum, pennisetum and schizachyrium are all great examples, each with many available cultivars. All three of these examples are warm-season grasses and should be planted in spring once temperatures can be maintained at 60F (15C) or higher.

A 30-ct liner will finish a 1-gal. container in seven to nine weeks, while a 72-ct liner will take 12 to 14 weeks to finish a smaller trade gallon container. Finished gallons or trade gallons can also be stepped up into larger, 2- to 5-gal. containers and overwintered for a large, full plant to sell the following season. This is often the preferred method, since overwintered plants will be much fuller and more impressive than with the fresh-planted production method.

Sedum

Reliable, long-blooming and one of few late-season nectar sources for pollinators ... these are just a few attributes of the group of fall-blooming sedums known as Autumn Stonecrop. Plants are resilient and drought-tolerant, and the late summer blooms can be left on for winter interest.

Plant from bareroot in late spring for finishing a 1-gal. in eight to 12 weeks, or 72-ct liners in summer to late summer for overwintering and selling the following season. Sedum prefer warm and slightly dry soil conditions, and require long days for flowering.

Rudbeckia

Black Eyed Susans are a quintessential late summer/fall perennial, and the newer cultivar American Gold Rush is an upgrade over older genetics that's slightly more compact and features improved resistance to Septoria leaf spot. Sunny golden-yellow flowers with dark cones are produced from July to September. As with coneflowers, rudbeckia flowers can be left on to feed the birds, and provide later fall and winter interest.

Plant from liners in late spring to early summer for fall sales, allowing for eight to 10 weeks to finish a trade gallon from a 72-ct and six to eight weeks from a 30-ct.

Hibiscus

Hardy perennial hibiscus are rather unique among perennials, in that they look like they belong in the tropics. Massive, 7- to 9-in. diameter flowers begin to open in midsummer, with newer genetics continuing to flower until frost. Due to their preference for warm temperatures and high light, hardy hibiscus are a perfect summer crop to grow for fall sales.

Plant in 2-gal. containers from a 72-ct plug for finishing in 10 to 12 weeks, or use a beefy bareroot in a 3-gal. pot for finishing in eight to 10 weeks. Keep in mind that UV light is needed to produce the true colors on the dark-leaved varieties, so grow them under glass or outdoors for the best color.

Buddleia

With the heightened focus on pollinator plants over the last several years, Butterfly Bush is a great addition to the

late summer/early fall landscape. While not a host plant, the flowers do provide nectar to adult butterflies. Newer selections, such as Lilac Cascade and Violet Cascade, have been monitored closely for sterility without observing seed set, which is an ideal trait since some buddleia are invasive in parts of the country.

Plant Butterfly Bush from liners in late spring to early summer for a fall crop; 72-ct liners will finish a 1-gal. container in eight to 10 weeks, while larger 30-ct liners are best in 2-gal. containers, which will finish in 10 to 12 weeks and command a premium price.

Perovskia

Russian Sage is an ideal perennial for the hot, dry dog days of summer. They begin to flower in mid-summer, but continue to offer color well into fall, and the silvery foliage pairs well with many other perennials.

The fastest method for producing perovskia for fall is to use bareroot planted in late spring, which will finish a 1-gal. pot in eight to 10 weeks. An alternative method is to plant 72-ct liners in summer to late summer and overwinter them for the following season sales. Being dayneutral, perovskia doesn't require long days for flowering, but high light is recommended for best performance. **GT**

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Heliopsis Tuscan Gold.



Heuchera Peachberry Ice (left) and Black Pearl (right).



Anemone Fall in Sweetly.



Perovskia Denim 'n Lace.



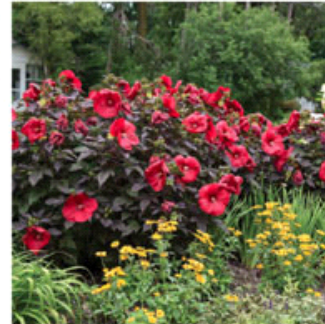
Echinacea Lakota Fire.



Panicum Apache Rose.



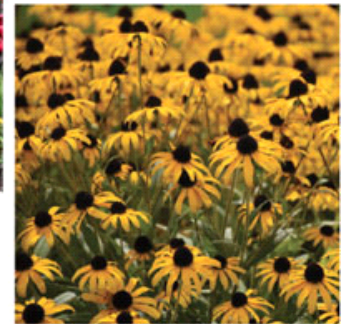
Sedum Pure Joy (foreground).



Hibiscus Holy Grail.



Buddleia Violet Cascade.



Rudbeckia American Gold Rush.