

CSU's Top Performing Perennials, Hottest New Perennials & the First Challenge of the Year



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What's Happening Here?

The future arrival of spring is a wonderful thing, as I'm sure many of you have had more than your share of cold temperatures and snow. Winter isn't over yet, but spring is on the horizon. With spring comes new surprises and challenges. Here are a couple of them:



The images above show similar, but different, issues that often surprise growers as their overwintered crops begin to wake up in the late winter or early spring. I wish it weren't true, but I think it's safe to say that I'm not the only one to have experienced these issues. Have these problems happened to you?

It's time for me to ask: Do you know what's happening here? Stay tuned and I'll reveal these surprises before signing off.



CSU's Top Performing Perennials of 2025

I'd like to share the Top Performing Perennials in the Colorado State University perennial trials with you. These nine perennials are the best of the best, the elite, the crème de la crème. They not only received the highest plant ratings (>4 out of 5), but they also had near 100% survival rates over the last three years (two winters and three summers). If you're looking for some top-tier perennials to add to your perennial programs, consider these.

Aster Showmakers Blue Bayou



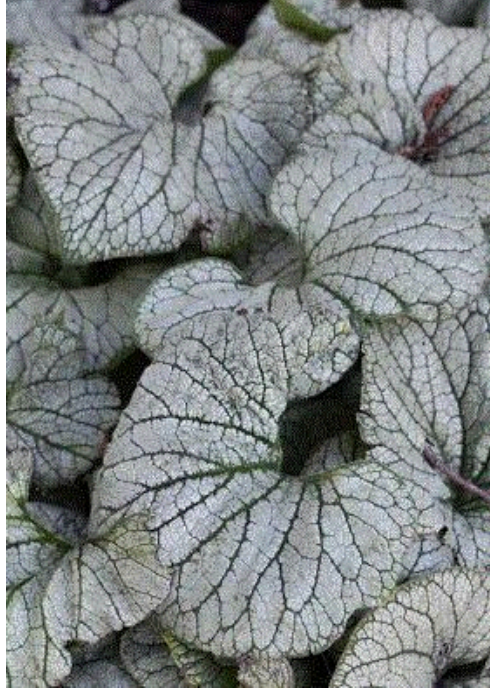
Showmakers Blue Bayou from Van Zanten Breeding B.V. is described as being both impressive and bold. It has larger blooms (slightly larger than the size of a quarter) than many other asters and flowers late into the season. The intense, deep blue-purple color and flower power creates an eye-catching showstopper. Grows just 12-in. tall and is cold hardy to Zone 4.

Bouteloua Honeycomb



Honeycomb is an interesting ornamental blue grama grass from Intrinsic Perennial Gardens. Honeycomb produces upright wire-like stems standing 24- to 30-in. tall. In June it begins blooming with eyelash-like flowers holding yellow pollen. The flowerheads appear to gracefully dance above the foliage. Honeycomb is drought tolerant and provides multiple seasons of garden interest, including its tan winter appearance in the landscape. Hardy to Zone 4.

Brunnera Permafrost



Permafrost is proving itself to be a top candidate for landscape designers. Why, you ask? Once established, it's quite heat and drought tolerant, resulting in less leaf edge browning compared to other brunnera cultivars on the market. These attributes combined with being both deer and rabbit resistant make Permafrost a great addition to landscapes with dry shade. Its attractive silver white-and-green veined heart-shaped leaves, not to mention its baby blue flowers in the early spring, will brighten up shade gardens across the country. Hardy to Zone 4.

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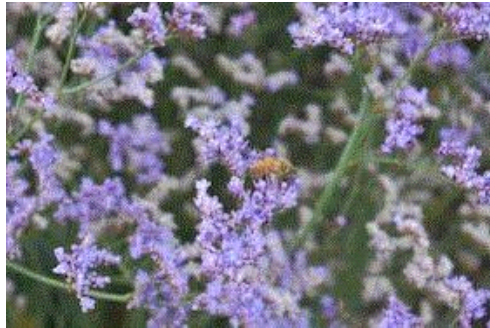


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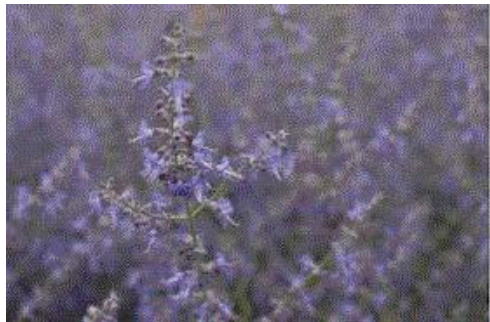
CSU's Top Performers Part II

Limonium Dazzle Rocks



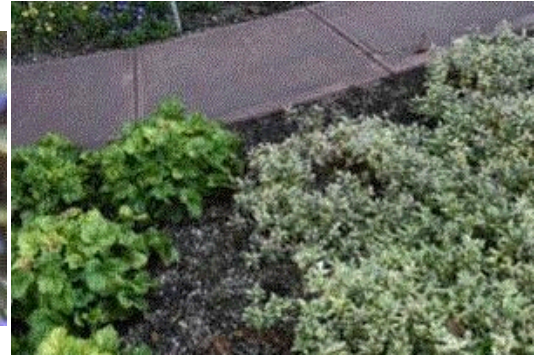
I'm guessing you never expected a statice to be one of the top-performing perennials in the trials. It was a surprise for me, as well, but Dazzle Rocks really does rock! It's a bit of a slow starter, taking a couple growing seasons to get into prime form and performance. Dazzle Rocks was submitted by Eason Horticulture and Creekhill Nursery as an underused and underappreciate genus that deserves more attention. Once established, it's adaptable to low water inputs, including drought tolerance, and also makes a great cut flower. Also worth noting is that it's resistant to both deer and rabbits. Dazzle Rocks has a compact habit and produces lots of rich, purple flowers per stem from early summer into the fall. Hardy to Zone 4.

Perovskia CrazyBlue



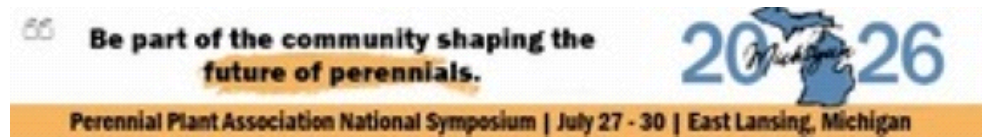
What's better than being a Top Performer Perennial? Being a two-time Top Performer Perennial! That's right—CrazyBlue from Darwin Perennials also earned this elite distinction back in 2021. Like its name implies, CrazyBlue produces copious amounts of intense, blue-purple flowers held nicely on the characteristic, blue-gray-green foliage and stems. Despite its 30-in. tall growing habit, CrazyBlue has unique interlacing branches that not only prevents breaking open in the landscape, but they also reduce breakage during shipping. Hardy to Zone 3.

Phlox divaricata Blue Ribbons



The folks at Eason Horticulture and Creekhill Nursery must have known they had a couple crowned jewels, as Blue Ribbons is the second plant they submitted to be selected as a Top Performer in the CSU perennial trails. Blue Ribbons is a variegated semi-evergreen *Phlox divaricata* cultivar with great vigor and showmanship.

Blue Ribbons grows 8- to 10-in. tall and produces fragrant violet blue flowers in the early spring. The leaves have nice creamy white borders and provide multiple seasons of interest as they turn a reddish hue under colder and winter conditions. Hardy to Zone 4.



CSU's Top Performers Part III

Phlox Luminary Prismatic Pink



What's the main criteria many would consider when it comes to tall garden phlox? I suspect powdery

mildew resistance would be the top one. Well, I have some good news for you. Phlox Luminary Prismatic Pink showed absolutely no powdery mildew in the trials. This, combined with its intensely colored panicles of bubblegum pink flowers with dark pink eyes lasting from late summer to early fall and medium dark green foliage on sturdy, straight stems, and Proven Winners has a confirmed winner with Prismatic Pink. Hardy to Zone 3.

Salvia Salute Neon Pink



Salute Neon Pink from Dümmen Orange definitely caught the attention of the trial evaluators with its stunning, rich neon pink flowers borne on darker pink to almost mahogany spires. It caught the attention of numerous pollinators, as well. Salute Neon Pink has a uniform, well-branched growing habit, reaching just 18-in. tall and deserves numerous salutations, whether used as a specimen plant or in mass plantings. Hardy to Zone 3.

Sedum Rock 'N Grow Midnight Velvet



Midnight Velvet from Proven Winners brings a new foliage color and flower color combination to the landscape. This sturdy, upright sedum has deep, purple-burgundy velvet-looking foliage lasting from emergence to the end of the season. It produces mauve-pink flower buds in the mid-summer opening to rich rosy-red flowers in the early fall. Midnight Velvet is definitely a pollinator magnet and a great candidate for dry landscapes. Hardy to Zone 3.

I'd like to thank CSU for their continued dedication to conducting perennial trials and for sharing their trial results with the industry.

Visit the [Colorado State University Perennial Trials website](#) to learn more about these and other perennials in the trial program.

Hottest New Perennials

If these Top Performers weren't enough to whet your appetite, I'd like to invite you to attend *GrowerTalks* upcoming livestream aptly titled, "The Hottest New Perennials of 2026 (and a Sneak Peek at 2027 Standouts!)."

Date: Thursday, March 12, 2026

Time: 1:00 p.m. Eastern/12:00 p.m. Central

Come join perennial guru Laura Robles (Walters Gardens Regional Product Manager) as she reviews 15 of the hottest new perennials available at retail in 2026. As an added bonus Laura will also be providing a sneak peek at 15 perennials Walters Gardens is planning to introduce in 2027.

Laura will share her knowledge and expertise as she delivers practical insights, best practices and growing tips to help you optimize plant performance and increase sales. Be sure to bring your perennial questions!

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Click [HERE](#) to sign up to attend this FREE must-see livestream.



The Answer is ...



I shared these images at the top of the newsletter and told you these issues were similar, but different. I also mentioned these issues occurred on plants that were overwintered and appeared shortly after the plants were awakened from their winter slumber.

Were you able to recognize either of these problems? Let's find out if your diagnostic skills are as sharp as I think they are.

The image on the left is showing a healthy colony of aphids that was carried over. Fun fact: Aphids can not only survive below-freezing temperatures, but they can actually actively move about and feed on crops when the temperatures are around 40F or even slightly lower than this. They can reproduce with temperatures as low as 50F.

The image on the right shows spider mite injury. At this resolution, I couldn't see any mites, but I have no doubts they were present. Spider mites can also survive freezing temperatures and become active when the temperatures rise above 50F. Many growers associate spider mites with warmer, if not hot, growing conditions, but trust me when I say they're active at much lower temperatures. It's not uncommon for low level populations to go undetected in the fall only to catch growers off guard as their population increases in the early spring.

Learn More About Prevention

This issue's diagnostic challenge was inspired by an article I wrote called "[Does the Cold Bug You?](#)" in the February 2026 issue of *GrowerTalks*. Although the article is framed around the premise of preventing and managing insect pests in early spring production, one of the take-home messages emphasizes the importance of properly cleaning and sanitizing empty production spaces before setting new crops on them.



In the article, I provide simple, easy-to-follow cleaning and sanitation procedures, as well as suggestions on how to manage pests on crops that have been overwintered.

The article is too long to include here, so [GO HERE](#) to read it.

My email is paul@pace49.com if you have any comments, article suggestions or if you'd just like to say hello.

Best regards,



Paul Pilon

Editor-at-Large—*Perennial Pulse*

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