

## Long-Lasting Summer Perennials

By Susan Camp

After our exceptionally long and cold winter, spring has proven delightful with sunny, breezy days that are warm enough to spend outdoors, yet still cool enough for a light jacket. Daffodils were glorious and the cheerful tulips were delightful; now the azaleas are putting on a glorious show.

The only problem with springtime is that the flowers last such a short time. The early spring ephemerals are gone before we can appreciate their true beauty. The early bulbs decorate our beds and borders, and the ornamental trees like dogwood and redbud leaf out almost before we can capture their blossoms in photos.

In a few weeks, another long, hot, humid summer will arrive, and we can work outside only in the mornings and late afternoons, if the no-see-ums will leave us alone to do some weeding.

Summer on the Middle Peninsula is the time of year when we need long-lasting garden perennials that can withstand the heat and humidity and return to bloom year after year with a minimum of effort on our part

*Gaura lindheimeri* (reclassified as *Oenothera lindheimeri*) is a North American native perennial wildflower now found over most of the country. Common names include beeblossom, wandflower, and whirling butterflies, because of the appearance of the flowers in a breeze.

Native gaura grows to a height of 3 to 5 feet with a spread of 1 to 2 feet. Wiry, flexible stems emerge from a tap-rooted clump, bearing dark green, lance-shaped leaves and delicate, four-petaled white blossoms that shade into pale pink. Gaura has a somewhat weedy, leggy appearance, and seedlings and new growth from underground rhizomes can crowd out other plants. Fortunately, gaura cultivars abound that minimize invasiveness and improve appearance. Most gaura cultivars bloom from late spring through mid-fall.

This spring, Jim and I selected gaura cultivars 'Sparkle White' and 'Belleza Dark Pink' to plant in a bed with the Old Garden Rose 'Rosa Mundi' (*Rosa gallica versicolor*), a dark fuchsia pink and white striped variety.

Gaura 'Sparkle White' was a 2014 All-America Selections Bedding Plant Winner. It has a bushy, mounded growth habit. At 12 -30 inches in height, this gaura cultivar won't display the legginess characteristic of the native plant. The leaves are bright green, and the dainty, white flowers bloom the first year.

Gaura 'Belleza Dark Pink' is also a bushy, clump-forming plant. Mature height is 12 to 18 inches. The dark pink buds open to resemble dancing butterflies. The foliage is dark green edged with red.

All gaura cultivars tolerate sandy, loamy, well-drained soils in full sun. They also tolerate heat, drought, and deer, and thrive on neglect. White flies, aphids, and flea beetles can infest gaura. Root rot can occur with poor drainage.

Cultivars of North American native *Coreopsis verticillata*, commonly called threadleaf coreopsis, are welcome additions to borders and cottage or native gardens. These long-lasting perennials bear cheerful, daisy-like flowers and fine, thread-like leaves.

*C. verticillata* 'Zagreb' grows in compact bushy clumps from 1 to 3 feet tall. Bright yellow flowers with untoothed petals and a yellow center bloom profusely in May and June. 'Zagreb' will continue to bloom into early fall if deadheaded regularly, a somewhat tedious task in a large bed or border. It spreads both by rhizomes and self-seeding and will threaten to crowd out other perennials if not controlled.

*C. verticillata* 'Moonbeam' also grows in bushy clumps and reaches a height of 1 ½ to 2 ft. Its flowers are a soft, creamy yellow with yellow centers and bloom from June to August. 'Moonbeam' is sterile and spreads only by rhizomes.

*C. verticillata* cultivars require full sun and good drainage. They tolerate drought, sandy or rocky soil, and deer. Shear them back in late summer for a second flush of flowers. No serious problems affect coreopsis, although snails and slugs may munch on the leaves. Crown rot can develop if coreopsis is grown in moist, poorly draining soil.

Find detailed information in the Missouri Botanical Garden Plant Finder.