

## New Perennials for Next Summer's Garden

By Susan Camp

Monday, September 2<sup>nd</sup> was Labor Day, the unofficial end of summer, which will officially say goodbye three weeks later on September 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Autumn Equinox. We have plenty of hot days left on the Middle Peninsula, but it isn't too soon to begin thinking about what worked in your gardens this summer and what requires change.

One way to tell that fall is upon us is to take a look at the garden. The summer vegetables are close to their end, although the okra is still producing gorgeous green pods, and Jim has plenty of sweet peppers left for stir fries and shish kebabs.

The flower beds are looking pretty ragged and leggy. I have entirely too much *Rudbeckia fulgida*, a species of "Black-eyed Susan" that is native to much of Virginia. This herbaceous perennial is extremely hardy, but spreads aggressively by rhizomes and will take over a bed or border unless you remain vigilant. I like the cheerful yellow flowers, but tire of pulling out the strays that wander where they don't belong.

If you grow perennials, fall is the ideal time to clean up the garden and divide or plant new ones that will bloom in spring or early summer. Soil temperatures remain warm until the first frost, so perennials planted now will have time to develop healthy root systems before the cold weather arrives.

Early fall is also the time to shop across our region for native and other perennials at local plant sales. The Gloucester Extension Master Gardener Annual Plant Extravaganza is scheduled for Friday, September 13<sup>th</sup> from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. and Saturday, September 14<sup>th</sup> from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. Numerous other plant sales will be held this fall.

Once you decide which plants need to be divided or removed completely, you can begin to think about replacements. My workhorses that perform well every year will remain, including the peonies, clethra, meadow sage, and old garden roses.

I usually add three or four new perennials each year. My selections for this fall include sweet Joe-Pye weed (*Eutrochium purpureum*, formerly known as *Eupatorium purpureum*), boneset (*Eupatorium perfoliatum*), and winecup (*Callirhoe involucrata*).

Joe-Pye weed is one of my favorite native perennials. I have grown several species, and this year I want to try *E. purpureum*, a tall plant at 5 to 7 feet with a spread of 2 to 4 feet. The stems of Joe-Pye weed are sturdy, but a wall or fence will help to keep them erect. Tiny, feathery, pinkish-purple flowers with a light vanilla scent bloom from July to September. The flowers attract numerous species of butterflies and bees. In the past, I have planted three-nerved Joe-Pye weed (*E. dubium*) 'Little Joe,' a smaller species. Both are native to our region, along with hollow Joe-Pye weed (*E. fistulosum*). All species require full sun to part shade. Joe-Pye weed likes fertile, humusy soil that doesn't dry out.

Common boneset or feverwort (*Eupatorium perfoliatum*) grows in low-lying, wet areas throughout the eastern United States. The wrinkled, lance-shaped, bright green leaves grow in

opposite pairs around 3- to 6-foot-tall hairy stems that may require staking. In late summer to early fall, flat-topped clusters of dainty white flowers bloom on the tops of the stems. Boneset and Joe-Pye weed complement each other well.

My final new perennial selection is purple poppy mallow or wine cup (*Callirhoe involucrata*), one of several species of mallows native to the central United States. Poppy mallows prefer dry, rocky areas and can succumb to crown rot in soils with poor drainage. Each plant grows to only 6 to 12 inches high, but can form a 3-foot diameter mat that is ideal for a border or rock garden. The rounded, hairy leaves are dark green, and the cup-shaped flowers are pink, magenta, or burgundy. Flowers open in the morning and close in the evening.

Find detailed information on these and other perennials in the Missouri Botanical Garden Plant Finder.