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GARDENING WITH TEXAS TOUGH PERENNIALS

What is the difference between an annual and a perennial?

Annuals are plants that bloom, set seed, and die in a single growing season. Perennials, on the other hand, are plants that return year after year--some may only come back for two or three years while others will keep returning for decades. Some perennials are evergreen, but most go dormant in the Fall and return in the Spring from the roots.

How should a Texas gardener start a perennial garden?

Start with a master plan. Know the layout and dimensions of your garden. Know where, when, and for how long sunlight hits your garden. Choose plants accordingly, giving large perennials plenty of room to mature and arranging for many perennials to be planted en masse for greater effect. For the sunny perennial garden it is best to choose plants that bloom at different times of the year to create a dynamic garden with successive waves of color. For shady perennial gardens where flowering perennials are limited, focus on choosing plants with different foliage textures and colors.

Follow up the master plan with thorough bed preparation. North Texas is notorious for its alkaline, clay soil, and to fix the sins of our soil you will need two things: expanded shale and compost. Creating raised beds or berms is also recommended.

Expanded shale is a gravel-size rock that has been heated to a high temperature to create air pockets within that help to break up and aerate clay soils, aid in moisture retention and soil drainage. Expanded shale only needs to be added to the soil once.

Compost is organic matter that has undergone an accelerated decaying process in order to be used as a fertilizer and soil conditioner. Compost can be made at home or can be conveniently purchased in bags. Commonly sold composts include: cotton burr blends (Back to Earth) and cow manure.

To add these soil amendments, spread a 3 inch deep layer of expanded shale over the entire flower bed, and till the shale into the soil to a depth of 6 to 8 inches. Two or more passes may be needed to break up the clay soil sufficiently. Repeat the process by tilling in a 3 inch layer of compost.

How should a perennial garden be maintained?

Most perennials should be planted and fertilized regularly with a well-balanced, slow-release fertilizer to promote steady growth. When watering perennials, they should be watered less often (only once or twice a week), but deeply to encourage the roots to go down rather than out. Be sure to keep the bed dressed with a 3 inch layer of shredded wood mulch to curtail water evaporation and to choke out weeds. Shredded wood mulches also have the added benefit of decomposing over time, which puts more nutrients into the soil.

And while perennials do not need to be planted every year, for those that go dormant in the winter, you need to provide basic yearly maintenance. After a perennial has gone through one or two hard frosts, cut back the foliage to within 4-6 inches from the ground as this helps prevent the spread of diseases and cleans up the look of the bed. Every two or three years, perennials will also need to be divided and thinned out so that they do not become overgrown and stagnant.

With these basics under your belt, you are now ready to enter the realm of PERENNIALS!

TOP PERENNIALS FOR SUN

The following perennials were chosen for their heat and drought tolerance.

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| Angel's Trumpet (<i>Datura meteloides</i>) | Height: 3-4 feet | Spread: 3-5 feet |
| Flower color: White | Bloom period: Spring to Fall | Herbaceous |
| Fragrant. Very hardy. Tolerant of poor soils. All parts of the plant are poisonous. Other notable variety: Purple Petticoats | | |
| Autumn Sage (<i>Salvia greggii</i>) | Height: 2-3 feet | Spread: 18 inches- 2 feet |
| Flower color: Red | Bloom period: Spring to Fall | Semi-evergreen |
| Attracts hummingbirds. Shear to keep bushy. Other varieties: Hot Lips, Wild Thing, Ultra Violet, Furman's Red, Coral | | |
| Balloon Flower (<i>Platycodon grandiflorus</i>) | Height: 8-10 inches | Spread: 9 inches |
| Flower Color: Blue, Pink, White | Bloom Period: Summer | Herbaceous |
| Large star-shaped blooms on compact plants. Plant in well-drained soil in full sun to part shade. | | |
| Black-eyed Susan (<i>Rudbeckia hirta</i>) | Height: 2-3 feet | Spread: 1-2 feet |
| Flower color: Yellow | Bloom period: Summer | Herbaceous |
| Butterfly nectar plant. Short-lived perennial that reseeds and naturalizes easily. Makes a great cut flower. Deadhead to encourage new blooms. Notable variety: Goldstrum | | |
| Blackfoot Daisy (<i>Melampodium leucanthum</i>) | Height: 12-18 inches | Spread: 12-18 inches |
| Flower color: White | Bloom period: Summer to Fall | Herbaceous |
| Blanket Flower (<i>Gaillardia grandiflora</i>) | Height: 12-30 inches | Spread: 18 inches |
| Flower color: Yellow, orange, red | Bloom period: Summer to Fall | Herbaceous |
| Deadhead to encourage blooms. Tolerates poor soils. Notable varieties: Gallo Yellow, Sun Devil, Goblin, Arizona Sun | | |
| Butterfly Bush (<i>Buddleia davidii</i>) | Height: 4-6 feet | Spread: 4-5 feet |
| Flower color: Purple, pink, white | Bloom period: Summer to Fall | Deciduous, shrub-like |
| Butterfly nectar plant. Grows quickly. Deadhead to encourage new blooms. Notable varieties: Black Knight, Blue Chip, Miss Molly, Nanho Blue | | |
| Butterfly Weed (<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>) | Height: 24-36 inches | Spread: 18-24 inches |
| Flower color: Orange | Bloom period: Summer to Fall | Herbaceous |
| Butterfly nectar and host plant. Remove seed pods to encourage new blooms. | | |
| Coneflower (<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>) | Height: 2-4 feet | Spread: 18-24 inches |
| Flower color: All colors except blue | Bloom period: Late Spring to Fall | Herbaceous |
| Butterfly nectar plant. Long-lived perennial. A staple for any perennial garden and makes a great cut flower. Deadhead to encourage new blooms. Tolerant of poor soils. Notable varieties: Magnus, Pow Wow | | |
| Coreopsis (<i>Coreopsis grandiflora</i>) | Height: 2-3 feet | Spread: 2 feet |
| Flower color: Yellow, pink, red | Bloom period: Late Spring to Early Summer | Herbaceous. |
| Butterfly nectar plant. Short-lived perennial that reseeds and naturalizes easily. Deadhead to encourage blooms. Tolerates poor soils. Notable varieties: Crème Brulee, Early Sunrise, Heaven's Gate, Jethro Tull, Moonbeam, Route 66, Salsa | | |
| Daylily, Stella de Oro (<i>Hemerocallis x hybrida</i>) | Height: 24 inches | Spread: 18-24 inches |
| Flower color: Yellow | Bloom period: Summer | Herbaceous |
| Reblooms throughout the summer. Other notable varieties: Ming Toy, Happy Returns | | |
| Dwarf Mexican Petunia (<i>Ruellia brittoniana</i>) | Height: 8 inches | Spread: 12 inches |
| Flower color: Purple, pink, white | Bloom period: Spring to Fall | Evergreen |
| Low maintenance. Reseeds quickly. Great groundcover for the sun. Tolerant of poor soils. | | |
| Garden Phlox (<i>Phlox paniculata</i>) | Height: 18-30 inches | Spread: 18 inches |
| Flower color: Pink, lavender, white | Bloom period: Late Spring-Summer | Herbaceous |
| Butterfly nectar plant. Fragrant. Notable varieties: John Fanick, Victoria, Robert Poore, David | | |
| Gaura (<i>Gaura lindheimeri</i>) | Height: 18 inches | Spread: 18-30 inches |
| Flower color: White, pink | Bloom period: Summer to Fall | Herbaceous |
| Adds a soft movement to gardens. Notable varieties: Whirling Butterflies, Crimson Butterflies, Passionate Blush | | |

- Hardy Hibiscus, “Texas Star” (*Hibiscus coccineus*)** Height: 6-8 feet Spread: 3 feet
Flower color: Red Bloom period: Summer Herbaceous
Water and fertilize consistently. Other notable varieties: Lady Baltimore, Lord Baltimore, Kopper King, Turn of the Century, Luna Pink Swirl, Luna Red, Luna White
- Lamb’s Ear (*Stachys byzantina*)** Height: 12-18 inches Spread: 24 inches
Flower color: Lavender Bloom period: Spring Evergreen
Very tough perennial. Soft to the touch. Removing blooms is encouraged.
- Lantana, “New Gold” (*Lantana x hybrida*)** Height: 12 inches Spread: 24-36 inches
Flower color: Yellow Bloom period: Late Spring to Fall Herbaceous
Butterfly nectar plant. Other notable varieties: Dallas Red, Bandana series, Bandito series
- Mealycup Sage, Victoria Blue (*Salvia farinacea*)** Height: 12 inches Spread: 12 inches
Flower Color: Violet blue Bloom Period: Spring-Fall Herbaceous
Texas native with 8-10 inch flower spikes, attractive grayish-green foliage. Other notable varieties: Evolution
- Mexican Bush Sage (*Salvia leucantha*)** Height: 4 feet Spread: 3 feet
Flower color: Purple, white Bloom period: Summer to Fall Semi-evergreen
Attracts hummingbirds. Silvery foliage complements other plants well. Notable variety: Santa Barbara
- Pincushion Flower (*Scabiosa caucasica*)** Height: 12 inches Spread: 18 inches
Flower color: Purple, pink Bloom period: Spring to Fall Herbaceous
Butterfly nectar plant. Makes a great cut flower. Notable Varieties: Butterfly Blue, Pink Mist
- Red Hot Poker (*Kniphofia uvaria*)** Height: 3-5 feet Spread: 3 feet
Flower color: Yellow, orange, red Bloom period: Summer to Fall Herbaceous
Attracts hummingbirds. Notable varieties: Creamsicle, Ember Glow, Papaya Popsicle, Pineapple Popsicle
- Russian Sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*)** Height: 3-4 feet Spread: 3-4 feet
Flower color: Light purple/ light blue Bloom period: Summer to Fall Deciduous
Long blooming period. Very hardy. Fragrant.
- Salvia, Black and Blue (*Salvia Guaranitica*)** Height: 30-40 inches Spread: 24 inches
Flower Color: Electric Blue Bloom Period: Mid-Summer Herbaceous
Flowers contrast sharply with black stems in summer. Butterflies and hummingbirds love them.
- Salvia, Indigo Spires (*Salvia x longispicata*)** Height: 4 feet Spread: 24 inches
Flower Color: Blue Bloom Period: Summer-Fall Herbaceous
Large 15 inch spike flowers. Other notable varieties: Mystic Spires (dwarf) reaches height of 18-24 inches.
- Salvia, May Night (*Salvia nemorosa*)** Height: 18-24 inches Spread: 12 inches
Flower Color: Blue Violet Bloom Period: Spring-Summer Herbaceous
Butterflies and hummingbirds love it.
- Santolina, Gray “Lavender Cotton” (*Santolina chamaecyparissus*)** Height: 12-18 inches Spread: 2 feet
Color: Yellow Bloom Period: Late Spring-Summer Evergreen
Aromatic dense silver green foliage. Loves heat. Tolerates poor, dry soil.
- Skullcap, Pink (*Scutellaria suffrutescens*)** Height: 8-12 inches Spread: 2-3 feet
Flower Color: Pink Bloom Period: Spring to Fall Herbaceous
Hardy evergreen with small leaves stays low, spreads wide and blooms heavily all summer.
- Texas Primrose (*Calylophus drummondii*)** Height: 8-12 inches Spread: 2 feet
Flower Color: Yellow Bloom Period: Spring to Fall Herbaceous
Bushy and upright growth habit and needle-like foliage. Tolerates poor, dry soils.
- Turk’s Cap (*Malvariscus arboreus*)** Height: 4-5 feet Spread: 4 feet
Flower color: Red Bloom period: Spring to Fall Deciduous
Shrub-like perennial. Attracts hummingbirds. Can be planted in full sun to full shade.

Tuscan Blue Rosemary (<i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>)	Height: 3-4 feet	Spread: 2-3 feet
Flower color: Light purple/ light blue	Bloom period: Spring to Summer	Evergreen shrub
Culinary uses. Be careful not to overwater. Other notable varieties: Hardy, Prostrate		
Veronica “Royal Candles Speedwell” (<i>Veronica spicata</i>)	Height: 12 inches	Spread: 12 inches
Flower color: Violet Blue	Bloom period: Summer to Fall	Herbaceous
Upright, compact. Great for decorative containers, low borders or mass plantings.		
Wormwood, “Powis Castle” (<i>Artemisia ludoviciana</i>)	Height: 3 feet	Spread: 2-3 feet
Foliage color: Silver/grey		
Be careful not to over water. Complements other plants well with its neutral colored, soft textured foliage. Tolerates poor soils. Other notable variety: Silver Mound (dwarf) reaches 9 inches tall and 24 inches wide.		
Yarrow (<i>Achillea millefolium</i>)	Height: 2-3 feet	Spread: 2-3 feet
Flower color: White, peach, pink, orange, red	Bloom period: Late Spring to Fall	Herbaceous
Butterfly nectar plant. Tolerates poor soils. Notable varieties: Moonshine, Paprika, Summer Pastels		

TOP PERENNIALS FOR SHADE

The following perennials were chosen for their heat tolerance.

Ajuga (<i>Bugleweed</i>)	Height: 6-10 inches	Spread: 12-24 inches
Flower Color: Blue	Bloom Period: Spring	
Foliage Color: Pale burgundy, green, black, bronze		Herbaceous
Rapid growing, easy to maintain evergreen groundcover. Grows well under trees & where other plants have difficulty. Notable varieties: Black Scallop, Bronze Beauty, Burgundy Glow, Chocolate Chip, Catlin’s Giant		
Autumn Fern (<i>Dryopteris erythrosora</i>)	Height: 18 inches – 2 feet	Spread: 18 inches
Foliage color: Green in the Summer; orange in the Fall.	Herbaceous	Drought tolerant
Will provide interest to your garden all year long. Cut back damaged fronds after new growth begins in spring.		
Columbine (<i>Aquilegia chrysantha</i>)	Height: 2 feet	Spread: 2 feet
Flower color: White, yellow, blue, red	Bloom period: Spring	Herbaceous
Butterfly nectar plant. Long-lived and reseeds freely. Notable varieties: Texas Gold, Origami		
Coral Bells (<i>Heuchera</i>)	Height: 12-18 inches	Spread: 12-18 inches
Foliage color: Purple, red, green, silver, black, brown, orange		
Flower color: Pink, red, cream, white	Bloom period: Spring	Evergreen
Butterfly nectar plant. Attracts hummingbirds. Some varieties are fairly sun tolerant when given enough water. Notable varieties: Cinnabar Silver, Stoplight, Paprika, Shanghai, Delta Dawn, Fire Alarm, Lime Marmalade, Sweet Tart		
Dead Nettle (<i>Lamium maculatum</i>)	Height: 6-8 inches	Spread: 2-3 feet
Flower color: Pink, white	Bloom period: Late Spring to Early Summer	Herbaceous
Adds highlights to shady areas. Drought tolerant. Notable varieties: Pink Pewter, White Nancy, Beacon Silver		
Fescue, “Elijah Blue” (<i>Festuca glauca</i>)	Height: 8-12 inches	Spread: 8-12 inches
Flower color: Tan	Bloom period: Late Summer	Evergreen
Grows quickly. Drought tolerant. Great as a ground cover or edging.		
Foxglove (<i>Digitalis purpurea</i>)	Height: 2-5 feet	Spread: 12-30 inches
Flower color: Pink, purple, white	Bloom period: Spring to Summer	Herbaceous
Biennial that reseeds easily. Attracts hummingbirds. All parts of this plant are poisonous.		
Foxtail Fern (<i>Asparagus Meyeri</i>)	Height: 2 feet	Spread: 3-4 feet
Flower color: White	Bloom period: Summer	Evergreen
Not a true fern. Fairly sun tolerant when given enough water.		
Holly Fern (<i>Cyrtomium falcatum</i>)	Height: 2-3 feet	Spread: 3 feet
Large, glossy dark green fronds. Unique look among ferns. Somewhat drought tolerant.		

