



## ADDING A PERENNIAL TURN



Paired with other perennials or planted in mass, late-bloomers such as *Astilbe chinensis* 'Veronica Klosi' (left) and *Rudbeckia fulgida* 'Goldsturm' (right) bring color and sales during hot weather. (Photos courtesy of the Perennial Plant Association)

Extending a category's sales season means adding another turn,  
which translates into doubling profits.

**By Bridget White**

**D**uring the mid 1990s, perennial departments saw ever-increasing sales, as gardeners rediscovered the more "traditional" plants from their grandparents' generation. And perennials continue to be a growth market for growers across the country, challenging bedding plants with their higher price point.

The obstacle to increasing perennial sales even further is the common belief that perennials are spring bloomers that should be purchased in early spring and forgotten about. When the spring rush passes, gardeners and retailers alike tend to forget about this potentially profitable category.

"Most hobbyists garden because they want to," explains PPA Executive Director Steven Still, "not because they have to, and for them to be able to indulge their horticultural activities from early spring through early winter would be a real bonus."

Enter the "June is Perennial Gardening Month" program.

Sponsored by the Perennial Plant Association, the "June is Perennial Gardening Month" program is designed to extend the home gardening season for perennials through the promotion of summer- and fall-blooming

varieties. "Our new program," said Still, "will educate gardeners to the advantages of growing perennials almost year-round. And, of course, as consumers plant more often, the entire distribution chain experiences a trickle-up effect from garden centers to commercial growers to horticultural suppliers."

"Everyone benefits from the extension of the gardening season," adds Still.

### SUPPORTING THE SALE

Wisdom comes with age, at least it did with the "June is Perennial Gardening Month" program.

The program's first year introduced a great concept and endless possibilities, and its second year will add a cohesive marketing package and increased marketing support. "This year," explained Still, "we're focusing more on getting out information about the program. We can help growers promote the program to their retailers, through signage and through assisting with promotional ideas."

The complete program includes 2- x 3-foot, color posters with pictures of June gardens, plants and the logo; slick, 8 1/2- x 11-inch flyers with the poster on the front and ideas for end users on the back; postcards depicting a variety of perennial garden scenes; Perennial

Plant of the Year posters and flyers dating from 1996 through 2002; plus "June is Perennial Gardening Month" logo wear.

The Association recognizes the potential of this marketing program, approaching it as a way to increase category sales. Promotional materials are cost-effective, with member prices just high enough to cover costs. For example, preprinted logo postcards cost 21 cents each, 27 for non-members. Photos and logos are also available from the PPA if you prefer to design your own promotional materials.

### SELECTION GUIDE

Your perennial list is probably quite extensive. To help growers select varieties that fit well into the program, those that are summer and fall bloomers and/or those that are used in the promotional materials, the PPA has identified the following "standard" perennials that will perform well in summer and fall plantings.

***Rudbeckia fulgida* 'Goldsturm'**. This long-blooming black-eyed susan has been a garden hit since its introduction from Germany following World War II. The bright yellow flowers bloom all summer on stems 36-48 inches tall. The 1999 Perennial Plant of the Year, Goldsturm can be used in commercial sites ♦

as well as the home landscape. Goldsturm can be paired with purple-leaved companions, such as *Ipomoea batatas* Blackie Sweet Potato Vine or *Weigela florida* ‘Alexandra’ Wine ‘n’ Roses, for striking combinations.

***Astilbe chinensis* ‘Veronica Klose’.** Veronica Klose has rose-purple flowers on 18-inch stems and requires moist soil and partial shade conditions. While most Astilbes flower in early June, Chinese Astilbes, such as Veronica Klose, a German export, reaches its ornamental best from June through the end of July. When partnered with early- and mid-season bloomers, Veronica Klose creates a continuous bloom period for Astilbe from mid-May through the beginning of August.

**Sedum ‘Matrona’.** One of the best-known summer flowering perennials, Sedum varieties will flower as late as August and September. Pictured left, Sedum Matrona was the 2000 International Perennial Plant of the Year.

Matrona is an eye-catching, tall-growing Sedum. The 18- to 24-inch stems bear gray-green leaves edged with rose pink. Large pink flowers are borne at a uniform height, creating a flat-topped appearance. Matrona does well in full sun and performs well with June planting. Matrona can easily be paired with other Sedums, such as the more popular ‘Autumn Joy’, to extend the bloom period or with greenery such as Spirea ‘Dakota Goldcharm’ for color contrast.

***Calamagrostis acutiflora* ‘Karl Foerster’.** Ornamental grasses are experiencing a rise in popularity as gardeners discover their array of textures, forms, sizes and colors. The 2001 Perennial Plant of the Year, Karl Foerster is a versatile and maintenance-free grass suitable for mass plantings or containers. This grass has deep green, upright foliage that appears in early spring and matures to four feet in height with a 20-inch base. The 6-foot blooms appear in late spring and are soft to the touch, resembling wheat. Ornamental grasses add landscape through inactive winter months, and many gardeners will be interested in grouping several varieties together. Try Karl Foerster

behind shorter grasses such as *Pennisetum setaceum* ‘Red Riding Hood’ for color and height variety.

***Leucanthemum x superbum* ‘Becky’.** Becky shasta daisy is the perfect perennial for the summer garden because of its long-lasting bloom. It produces large, single white flowers from June through October, especially if plants are deadheaded, on strong, 36- to 42-inch tall stems that do not require staking. Becky’s dark, shiny green foliage holds up well in heat and humidity, tolerating conditions from full sun to partial shade. Becky also doubles as a cut flower. Chrysanthemums like Becky are most often thought of as fall plants; offering summer-blooming chrysanthemums is a great season extender, giving gardeners a smooth transition from summer to fall landscapes.

**Hosta ‘Francee’.** If your customers have shady gardens, they are probably familiar with several varieties of Hosta. Prized as foliage plants, selections range from blue-green to pale, silvery-green. Francee is a nicely mounding variety with white margins that can tolerate moist conditions and multiplies well. To inject color into a