HERBACEOUS PERENNIALS FOR CUT FLOWERS

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Time was when the flowers handled by the commercial florist, were almost limited to varieties grown in greenhouses, and of those there were not so many kinds produced for the trade as at the present time. Who would have thought a few years ago, that such flowers which are considered out of door kinds, like sweet peas, snap-dragons, and calendulas, would be grown under glass in winter, and as much desired by some as are the old-fashioned stand-bys, roses, carnations, violets, lily-of-the-valley and chrysanthemums? Because of more acquaintance with them, and a greater love of flowers for their intrinsic beauty, there has grown steadily a broader appreciation of the usefulness, of a wider range of kinds, for use on various occasions than was formerly accepted.

The increased use of herbaceous perennials for beautifying home grounds, has led to a more intimate appreciation and knowledge of the usefulness of this class of flowers for indoor decoration in the summer time.

There are several classes of people, who might naturally be interested in the thoughts suggested by the title of this paper. First to be mentioned, are those who grow flowers in quantities for the wholesale market. The peony probably leads among kinds of flowers profitable to them. The various varieties of chrysanthemums, of which Shasta daisies are one kind of the class, are steadily increasing in demand, and before long will have a regular place in the market. Coreopsis and Gaillardias are finding their place, and the general appreciation of Delphinums has already started a demand which is placing these beautiful flowers among the standard commercial kinds.

Another class having a wider, as well as a closer personal interest in the subject than have the large commercial growers, includes the many smaller growers for local retail trade, who handle plants and flowers directly to consumers. Their plant trade gives them a close knowledge of the value
of various kinds, and the opportunity they have to introduce things of special beauty to their customers is a means of education which steadily increases the general knowledge of desirable varieties. Promoting a wider knowledge of a greater number of beautiful kinds increases the growers' opportunities to more continuously gratify the popular desire for a larger variety of flowers. The pleasure derived from sharing with others the flowers from our gardens, makes it desirable to plant more than is needed for the decoration of the grounds.

Many a wedding, and other social function, has been brightened by garden flowers, when roses and carnations were to be had with difficulty. Not long ago, in one of our local papers, was mentioned that the bride's bouquet was of platycodons, and that they harmonized well with the occasion. Many an invalid has been cheered with beautiful flowers from the garden, and anyone who is familiar with the available list, well knows that perennials furnish the greater variety of the really popular kinds of outdoor grown cut flowers. There is such a variety that we may select kinds suitable for vases, bouquets, sprays or designs.

A very important class of those who are interested in our subject, embraces those who buy flowers because they love them for their beauty, and have no chance to grow their own. To them the enterprising retail grower is an educator. They get their knowledge of flowers as they see them in well cared for grounds, or when offered for sale. Our summer flower shows are an inspiration to them as well as to the amateur flower growers.

This class of garden flowers has a wide range of seasons, consequently not all of the kinds can be shown at one time, but there are so many available kinds that from spring until winter sets in there is a continuous supply, if the fall weather is reasonably favorable. Notwithstanding the very unfavorable preceding weather conditions, the showing of perennial cut flowers at the last state fair repaid many times the efforts of the growers and the expense to the fair management. Those who attended the last summer meeting of the Wisconsin State Horticultural Society will remember that there were some very attractive perennial flowers shown by the Lake Geneva gardeners. At the spring horticultural shows, flowers of this class are always an attractive feature.
In making a selection of varieties suitable for Wisconsin, we must always consider hardiness,—favoring those kinds which will endure our winters with reasonably careful protection. As this is a prime requisite, we may here discuss a few first principles of winter protection. For all kinds surface drainage should be provided to as much as possible avoid decay of plants in the spring. Plants which hold their foliage through the winter, like Sweet Williams and Canterbury Bells, should be covered lightly to prevent the soggy mouldy condition which prevails under a heavy covering. A little brush will help to hold and also lighten the pressure of protecting litter. Such plants as peonies, Delphiniums, Gypsophilas and platycodons will bear a covering of coarse litter.

If plants are grown principally for flowers, the most convenient arrangement is to plant them in long rows which can readily be cultivated. Very few perennial borders are extensive enough to furnish all the flowers desired by those who are generous to their homes and friends, consequently a reserve supply of the favorite kinds should be planted.

For commercial value, perhaps peonies are the most important of perennials for cut flowers. Through early and late varieties, their beauty can be enjoyed for a long time. A few of the early varieties can be had in bloom here in Wisconsin for Memorial day, if given an early location. These early varieties include the different kinds of the officinalis class. The following are a few of the good cut flower varieties: Whites, Festiva, Maxima, Marie Leoine, Avalanche, Couronne d’Or, Duchess de Nemours; pink, Madam de Verneville, Edulis Superba, Modeste Guerin, Madam Emile Gaille, Delicatissima; red, Felix Crousse, Rubra Superba. Many varieties are not suited for commercial cut flower growing because of weak stem, color, poor shipping or keeping qualities, or lack of floriferousness. The foregoing do not constitute all the valuable commercial varieties by any means.

The iris is more suitable for local demand than as a general commercial flower, because the delicate texture of the flower will not permit shipping. They are quite general favorites and useful for a variety of occasions. If a branch is cut when the first buds are opening, other buds will develop and give quite a succession of flowers. The soil for the iris should be
reasonably fertile, and the plants should be divided every three or four years. A good time to do this is in August, although early springtime will answer.

A very important class of perennial flowers, includes the varieties and hybrids of Chrysanthemum leucanthemum and related varieties,—modifications of the old-fashioned ox-eye or moon-penny daisy. Just preceding and for a long time after Memorial Day we have the Memorial Daisy. This is a profuse blooming long keeping variety with stems long enough for use in vases or sprays, and it is very hardy. Next we have the variety called June Marguerite. They are of the Maximum class with larger flowers than the Memorial Daisy giving a long succession of bloom, and will winter over with reasonable protection. The Shasta Daisies follow. They have been so well advertised as almost to give their name to the class. They need frequent renewal from either seeds or division. A little later coming into bloom we have the Chrysanthemum latifolium. This class, including the variety Mrs. C. Lothian Bell with the rest will surely hold a place in the general flower market. Associated with these we might include the Pyrethrum or Chrysanthemum uliginosum, called Giant Daisy. Of slightly less importance but very desirable and growing in favor are some of the early pompon and anemone flowered Chrysanthemums. Nearly related to the Chrysanthemums are the varieties of Pyrethrum roseum. The flowers are attractive and lasting, in a variety of shades, from white to darkest red. When they can be had in separate shades, they will be still more popular. In warm situations they commence to flower by Decoration Day. They are very hardy and easily grown.

Before the Iris have ceased to bloom we have the Campanulas and Delphiniums. Canterbury bells, C. medium, are really biennials, but in our minds we associate them and a few others, with perennials. A few of the perennials we treat as biennials. Canterbury bells need extra care in winter, but they are worth it. With their profusion of large flowers, in various shades of blue, purple, lavender and pink they well deserve the various praise adjectives bestowed on them. For charming gracefulness nothing can excel the peach leaved bell flowers, or peach bells, Campanula persicifolia. Nothing can be imagined more dainty than a vase of these graceful flowers whether in separate colors of blue
and white or blended. I like the singles better than the doubles though both forms are desirable. With careful division in August or in spring they can be increased and can be wintered over with protection.

The Delphiniums or perennial larkspurs, especially those of the Belladonna class, are almost continuous bloomers, from the time they commence flowering to almost when winter sets in, if flowers have been freely cut to prevent seeding. Plenty of moisture must be provided for continuous flowering. After blooming has stopped, they should be cut back, and a new growth will start up giving a renewal of bloom, sometimes almost equal to the first crop. Those of the Belladonna class possess this remontant quality in a more marked degree than others. I speak of this variety as a class because they may be had in several distinct shades of blue. Some of the hybrid kinds give very stately plants, with magnificent spikes of bloom, in dark or light shades of blue, purple, and lavender with or without white centers. Some have overlaying the ground color a sort of changeable silk pink shading, which is very attractive. As cut flowers they keep a long time, and the plants are lasting in the garden.

Our native Polemonium reptans, or Greek Valerian, is easily grown and the plants are profuse bloomers. The blue flowers keep well in the vase but may not be of commercial value as a cut flower.

Platycodons, or Japanese bell flowers, are closely related to the Campanulas with blue or white flowers. They are hardy and easily grown, and should not be omitted from even the small collection.

Aquilegias or Columbines, have a wide range of beauty, in various shades of blue, purple, red, yellow, and white, with various combinations of these colors. The long spurred Rocky Mountain species and our own native aquilegia canadensis are among the best. They must go from the garden to the vase without much handling, but are appreciated for decorative affects.

Our native cardinal flower, Lobelia cardinalis, if given plenty of humus in the soil and not permitted to suffer badly for need of moisture, is not hard to grow, and the spikes of brilliant scarlet flowers make a fine display. Its companion species, the tall blue Lobelia is fine for the garden or as a
cut flower. The showy Oriental Poppy, Papaver orientalis, should be in every collection. If rightly handled they make a grand show as cut flowers. They may be had in various shades of red, scarlet, and pink, with a white variety. They will probably be always most popular in the scarlet. They seem to bear moving in August better than at any other time. The young seedlings need careful handling. They are hardy and easily grown if once established. The Iceland poppy or Papaver nudicaule comes in various shades of red, orange and white. They are early bloomers, and as vase flowers make very pleasing table decorations. These, like the larger poppies and peonies, should be picked when the bud is beginning to expand.

The old-fashioned scarlet Lychnis is so hardy, easily grown, and showy, it should be used more than it is. Above all others it is the dependable red flower to make a part of patriotic bouquets for Independence Day.

Yellow flowers are so bright and cheerful, they are winning an increased appreciation. The first of their color to bloom that is suitable for cut flowers, excepting the bulb flowers, is Dianthus or Leopard’s bane. The flowers are very bright and last a long time in water.

Next we have Coreopsis and Gaillardia. The Coreopsis are profuse bloomers and give a succession for a long time if kept from seeding. While good enough they show chances for further improvement through seed selection. They are so readily raised from seed it is as easy to treat them as biennials, as to carry over plants after they have been blooming all season.

Gaillardias are not confined to yellow, and are unique in their color effects of red, yellow, and maroon shading. They are very attractive as a cut flower and can be increased from division if it is desired to keep up a choice variety. There are surprises in store for those who have not seen some of the newer varieties.

The early Day, or Lemon lily, Hemorocallis flava, comes in bloom about Memorial Day time. While the individual flowers are not lasting, if sprays are cut, the buds open in succession for several days. Several later varieties, prolonging the season are also good.

Along about the same season with Coreopsis is the Heliopsis, looking somewhat like a refined prairie sunflower. They are floriferous, easily grown and hardy.
About this time we also have the Anthemis tinctoria, a wonderfully free bloomer, and the best are bright enough for any golden wedding decoration.

Later we have the perennial sunflowers. The double Helianthus multiflora is very good and should be in every collection which is large enough to include the others. Of the tall growing kinds, Wooley Dodd, Miss Mellish, and Maxmillianum are among the best.

Some of the improved Heleniums—Sneezeworts—should be in any fair sized collection. The flowers are mostly in yellows, but some are in golden bronze or reddish bronze shades, and are bright attractive, useful, and lasting. They like a fair amount of humus in the soil and are impatient of protracted dryness about the roots.

There are several kinds of white flowers, which are good for vases, and are helpful in combination with other flowers, or in designs. Earliest of these are the Achillea ptarmica varieties, The Pearl, and Perry's White. Their pure white flowers are very acceptable. They can be used in various ways. The plants are very hardy if divided often and kept free from weeds.

Baby's breath, or Gypsophila, in single or double, are charming alone, and blend well with other flowers in bouquets or designs. The doubled flowered are very fine and have an additional value as dried flowers. The doubles do not come very true from seed, but the young shoots of the best can be readily grafted on seedling roots.

A very useful kind of native flower grown in gardens, is the ageratum flowered Eupatorium. The abundant white flowers show well in vases, alone or in combination with other flowers, and are useful in design work.

Penstemmon Torreyii is very noticeable with its tall slender spikes of scarlet flowers. A vase of these would be gladly accepted by any flower lover. This paper is becoming so long it seems best to give brief mention to some other good things with a recommendation to try them. Physostegia, or false dragon head shows better when cut than on the plant. They can be had in both rosy lilac and white and are very hardy. Boltonia astroides and latisquama are tall free bloomers, one white, the other pink.

Artemesia lactiflora is something new, tall with small milk white flowers in August and later. While one might wish
for a purer white they are attractive and popular with some.

Dianthus latifolius, and the Sweet William are favorite flowers, as are also the hardy garden pinks.

Liatris or Gay Feather in two species, L. Squarrosa and L. Pychnostachia, are natives with long spikes of pink flowers and are unusual and striking in appearance.

The lily-of-the-valley and Tritomaz or red-hot-poker were nearly forgotten but are too good to be passed by without notice.

Valerian or garden heliotrope is good.

Be sure to grow our native Turk's cap lily, Lilium superbam, and for a gratifying surprise, grow Lycoris squamigera.

The Holland bulbs, tulips and Narcissi must be passed as deserving more attention than can be given them in this paper.

And now to close, with a few words about the care of cut flowers. If weather is warm they should not be cut during the heat of the day. Unnecessary leaves should be removed before placing the stems in water as too many leaves pass the water off faster than the stems can take it up. The desire for long stems sometimes leads to cutting down to where they are hard and woody. This often hinders water passing up to the flowers. For some plants with milky juice it is sometimes necessary to dip the stems as soon as cut into water that is near the boiling point. Searing the ends of the stems with a lighted match or hot coals will answer the same purpose. The after care should be the same as for other flowers. This heat cure is helpful to dahlias and peonies. The flowers in water should be placed in a cool dark room, until the stems and leaves have filled with water, after which they will bear up in use much better than without such care. Water should be changed often lest it becomes foul while the flowers are still good. Leaves attached and below the surface of the water promote decay. I have not had any experience with using chemicals to keep flowers fresh. Overheated dry atmosphere, especially with any taint of gas, is harmful to flowers as well as plants.
DISCUSSION FOLLOWING MR. TOOLE'S PAPER ON HERBACEOUS PERENNIALS

A LADY: I should like to ask in regard to covering the perennial garden, when is the best time to get on the winter covering, after the ground is frozen?

MR. TOOLE: In my own experience I would say after frost has come. Some would insist with the strawberries to wait until the ground has become frozen, but with perennials I would not wait until then. If the ground has become well crusted and you feel in your bones that winter is coming on, get your cover on.

A LADY: I cover my perennial garden before the ground is frozen and I wonder if it did any harm?

MR. TOOLE: Well, if there was not a great deal of growing weather after that, I should say no.

MR. HAUSER: I think it is well to give two covers to protect tender plants. Give one covering early between the plants, fill the rows between the plants, then when the ground is frozen later on, cover the plants. This between the plants will keep them from freezing.

AN HONOR WELL BESTOWED

MR. RICHARDSON: I would like to rise, on behalf of a call from many members of the Wisconsin State Horticultural Society, a call that we do honor today to Mr. William Toole, one of our oldest members, a man who has been with us for years. My own experience in this society goes back twenty-one years and he had been a wheel horse for I know not how long at that time, and I believe that in doing honor to him that we would be doing honor to ourselves, and I move you, Mr. President, at this time that in recognition of his services in all the different lines, that we confer upon him what is I suppose the highest honor that lies in our power. I move you, Mr. Chairman, that he be made an honorary life member of the Wisconsin State Horticultural Society.