

Perennials

In the Valley of the Sun

In the low desert of the Southwest, most of the “rules” people use to grow perennials become useless: many of the perennials grown in more temperate climates cannot survive our burning hot summers! On the other hand, there are many perennials that do just fine here in the desert, as long as their basic needs are met. Here are some of the most popular ones:

Perennial	Sun Exposure	Planting Season	Showy Season	Comments
Aroid Palm (<i>Zamioculcus zamiifolia</i>)	sh	sp.-fall	year-round	Extremely drought tolerant, best in containers. Frost tender.
Artichoke (<i>Cynara scolymus</i>)	hs	fall	spring	Either eat the buds, or let them turn into huge purple thistles!
Asparagus Fern (<i>Asparagus</i> species)	sh-fs	anytime	year-round	Many different kinds with different textures and shades of green.
Aster, Desert (<i>Machaeranthera bigelovii</i>)	fs-hs	l. win.	sp.-sum.	Arizona native wildflower.
Aster, True (<i>Aster</i> species & hybrids)	fs-hs	spring	sum.-fall	Not all kinds work: best so far are <i>A. amellus</i> , <i>A. x frikartii</i> , and <i>A. dumosus</i> hybrids.
Bear’s Breech (<i>Acanthus mollis</i>)	sh-hs	fall	fall-sp.	Primarily grown for large, dark green leaves, attractive pink flower spikes appear in spring.
Begonia, Shrubby (<i>Begonia</i> hybrids)	sh	spring	sp.-fall	<i>B. x ‘Richmondensis</i> & kin. Frost tender.
Begonia, Wax (<i>Begonia semperflorens</i>)	sh-hs	fall-sp.	year-round	Bronze-leaved forms can take more sun than green-leaved forms. Frost tender.
Bergenia (<i>Bergenia</i> hybrids)	sh	fall-sp.	spring	Big leaves, little flowers, very “woody”.
Black-Eyed Susan (<i>Rudbeckia hirta</i>)	fs-hs	fall-sp.	sp.-fall	Plants planted in fall bloom the following spring.
Blanket Flower (<i>Gaillardia grandiflora</i>)	fs-hs	fall-sp.	sp.-fall	Plants planted in fall bloom the following spring. Many varieties.
Blanket Flower (<i>Gaillardia aristata</i>)	fs-hs	fall-sp.	sp.-fall	Medium-tall wildflower.
Blood Flower (<i>Asclepias curassavica</i>)	hs	spring	sp.-fall	Attracts hummingbirds & butterflies.
Blue Spurge (<i>Euphorbia rigida</i>)	fs-hs	fall-sp.	year-round	Cut blooming stems off after flowers fade.
Bulbine (<i>Bulbine frutescens</i>)	hs	fall	win.-sp.	Keep on dry side through summer.
California Fuchsia (<i>Zauschneria californica</i>)	fs-hs	sp.-fall	fall-sp.	Stems are brittle: keep away from heavy traffic.
Candelilla (<i>Euphorbia antisyphilitica</i>)	fs-hs	anytime	year-round	Little pink-and-white flowers in fall & spring are pretty, but not showy.
Canna (<i>Canna x generalis</i>)	fs-hs	sp.-sum.	sp.-fall	Cut bloom spikes off after flowers fade. Cut leafy stem down to ground after all of its spikes have faded. Multiplies like rabbits.
Carnation (<i>Dianthus caryophyllus</i>)	hs	fall	sp.-sum	Dwarf kinds may bloom year-round.
Chocolate Flower (<i>Berlandiera lyrata</i>)	fs-hs	fall-sp.	sp.-fall	Smells like chocolate, 10:00 pm to 10:00 am!
Chrysanthemum (<i>Ch. morifolium</i>)	hs-sh	fall-sp.	fall	Some varieties will bloom again in spring.
Columbine, Golden (<i>Aquilegia chrysantha</i>)	sh-hs	fall	spring	Other species and hybrids will bloom, but rarely survive the summer. Short-lived.
Coreopsis (<i>Coreopsis grandiflora</i>)	fs-hs	fall-sp.	sp.-fall	
Coreopsis, Lance-Leaf (<i>Coreopsis lanceolata</i>)	fs-hs	fall-sp.	sp.-fall	Often sold as a wildflower.
Cup Flower (<i>Nierembergia linarifolia</i>)	fs-hs	sp.-fall	sp.-fall	Needs regular dead-heading and feeding for best results.
Cyclamen, Florist’s (<i>Cyclamen persicum</i>)	sh	fall-win.	fall-sp.	Keep on the dry side in the summer.
Daisy, Angelita (<i>Tetraneuris acaulis</i>)	fs-hs	fall-sp.	year-round	Needs regular dead-heading.

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Daisy, Blackfoot (<i>Melampodium leucanthemum</i>)	fs-hs	fall-sp.	fall-sp.	Arizona native.
Daisy, Devil's River (<i>Zexmenia hispida</i>)	fs-hs	sp.-fall	sp.-fall	Needs ample water.
Daisy, Shasta (<i>Chrysanthemum x maximum</i>)	hs	fall	spring	Dwarf kinds may bloom fall through spring.
Daylily (<i>Hemerocallis hybrids</i>)	hs-fs	fall-sp.	sp.-sum.	Evergreen types do best
Desert Marigold (<i>Baileya multiradiata</i>)	fs-hs	win.	sp.-fall	Arizona native. Keep on dry side.
Dianthus (<i>D. chinensis</i>)	sh-fs	fall-sp.	year-round	aka Chinese Pink. Needs ample water, regular feeding, and regular dead-heading.
Evening Primrose, Mexican (<i>Oenothera speciosa</i>)	fs-hs	spring	sp.-fall	A very pretty weed. Mow it down occasionally for repeat bloom.
Evening Primrose, Tufted (<i>Oenothera caespitosa</i>)	fs-hs	fall-sp.	fall & sp.	Blooms open at sundown, stay open 'til noon.
Fern, Sword (<i>Nephrolepis cordifolia</i>)	sh	sp.-fall	year-round	Grown for its foliage.
Gaura (<i>Gaura lindheimeri</i>)	fs-hs	fall-sp.	sp.-fall	Long-lived. Prune severely in Feb. and Aug.
Gazania, Clumping (<i>Gazania hybrids</i>)	fs-hs	fall-sp.	sp.-fall	Best with sandy soil, regular dead-heading.
Germander (<i>Teucrium x lucidrys</i>)	fs-hs	fall-sp.	summer	Good small-scale ground cover.
Globe Mallow (<i>Sphaeralcea</i> species)	fs-hs	fall-win.	fall-sp.	Keep on dry side in summer.
Golden Dysodia (<i>Thymophylla pentachaeta</i>)	fs-hs	sp.-fall	sp.-fall	Bulletproof, but smells funny when disturbed.
Goldeneye (<i>Viguiera multiflora</i>)	fs-hs	spring	sp.-fall	Prettier than its shrubby cousin, <i>V. deltoidea</i> , but may be hard to find.
Grass, Deer (<i>Muhlenbergia rigens</i>)	fs-hs	fall-sp.	year-round	Unlike other species in the genus, evergreen.
Grass, Desert Bear (<i>Nolina microcarpa</i>)	fs-hs	fall-sp.	year-round	Arizona desert native.
Grass, Mexican Feather (<i>Botanical name</i>)	hs	spring	sp.-fall	
Grass, Mondo (<i>Ophiopogon japonicum</i>)	sh	fall-sp.	year-round	Evergreen, with tiny pale pink flowers in summer. Many varieties.
Grass, Muhly (<i>Muhlenbergia</i> species)	fs-hs	fall-sp.	sp.-fall	<i>M. capillaris</i> gets misty pink flowers in the fall.
Grass, Pampas (<i>Cortaderia selloana</i>)	fs-hs	fall-sp.	year-round	Evergreen, with fluffy cream flowers in Aug. & Sep.
Grass, Purple Fountain (<i>Pennisetum setaceum</i> 'Rubrum')	fs-hs	fall-sp.	sp.-fall	Shear back severely in Feb. & Aug. for best appearance.
Hummingbird Mint (<i>Agastache</i> species)	hs-fs	spring	sum.-fall	Wide selection of species and hybrids, most needing fast draining sandy soil.
Iris, African (<i>Dietes vegeta</i>)	hs	fall-sp.	spring	Needs good drainage, deep watering to avoid salt damage. Pinch off faded flowers but don't cut off the flower spikes: they will bloom again.
Iris, Arilbred (<i>Iris</i> hybrids)	fs-hs	fall	spring	Keep on dry side in summer.
Iris, Bearded (<i>Iris x germanica</i>)	fs-hs	e. fall	spring	Easy, but with long dormant period. Some will also bloom in fall.
Iris, Louisiana (<i>Iris</i> hybrids)	hs	fall	spring	Need ample water—some can be bog plants.
Iris, Spuria (<i>Botanical name</i>)	fs-hs	fall	spring	Keep on dry side through summer
Lily Turf (<i>Liriope muscari</i>)	sh-hs	fall-sp.	summer	Needs good drainage, deep watering to avoid salt damage.
Lily Turf, Black (<i>Botanical name</i>)	sh	fall-sp.	year-round	Purple-black foliage turns green in very deep shade. Pale pink flowers in spring are a bonus.
Lily Turf, Giant (<i>Botanical name</i>)	sh	fall-sp.	year-round	Primarily grown for grassy leaves. Pale lavender flowers in late summer are a bonus.
Lily, Fortnight (<i>Dietes bicolor</i>)	hs	fall-sp.	spring	Needs good drainage, deep watering to avoid salt damage. Pinch off faded flowers but don't cut off the flower spikes: they will bloom again.
Lily, Kaffir (<i>Clivia miniata</i>)	sh	fall-sp.	winter	Needs good drainage, infrequent watering.

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Lily-of-Peru (<i>Alstoemeria</i> hybrids)	hs	fall	spring	Keep on dry side in summer.
Lisianthus (<i>Eustoma grandiflora</i>)	fs-hs	fall	sp.-fall	May be short-lived. Tall kinds do better, but may be hard to find.
Mexican Petunia (<i>Ruellia brittoniana</i>)	fs-hs	sp.-fall	sp.-fall	Very pretty weed!
Monkeyflower, Scarlet (<i>Mimulus cardinalis</i>)	hs-sh	fall-sp.	sp.-fall	Steamside plant: needs ample water.
Papyrus (<i>Cyperis papyrus</i>)	hs-sh	spring	year-round	Steamside plant: needs ample water.
Penstemon, Canyon (<i>Penstemon pseudospectabilis</i>)	fs-hs	fall	spring	Needs fast drainage. Keep on dry side in summer
Penstemon, Desert (<i>Penstemon parryi</i>)	fs-hs	fall	spring	Needs fast drainage. Keep on dry side in summer
Penstemon, Firecracker (<i>Penstemon eatonii</i>)	fs-hs	fall	spring	Needs fast drainage. Keep on dry side in summer
Penstemon, Rock (<i>Penstemon baccharifolius</i>)	fs-hs	fall-sp.	summer	Evergreen, semi-shrubby. Needs fast drainage.
Periwinkle (<i>Vinca major</i>)	sh-hs	fall-sp.	spring	Fast-growing ground cover.
Periwinkle, Dwarf (<i>Vinca minor</i>)	sh	fall	sp.-sum.	Slow-growing ground cover. Needs fast drainage.
Purple Heart (<i>Tradescantia pallida</i> ‘Purpurea’)	hs-sh	sp.-fall	sp.-fall	Grown for purple foliage. Scattered lilac blossoms are a bonus. Drought tolerant.
Queen’s Tears (<i>Bill bergia nutans</i>)	sh	spring	sp.-sum.	Best in containers, but can grow in fast draining soil—or on tree branches!
Red Yucca (<i>Hesperaloe parviflora</i>)	fs-hs	fall-sp.	sp.-sum.	Drought tolerant.
Rush, Soft (<i>Juncus effusus</i>)	sh	spring	sp.-fall	Bog plant: needs ample water.
Sea Lavender (<i>Limonium perezii</i>)	hs	fall	win.-sp.	Beach plant: needs fast drainage.
Society Garlic (<i>Tulbaghia violacea</i>)	hs	fall-sp.	sp.-fall	Ample water. Flowers are edible.
Sonoran Honeysuckle (<i>Justicia sonorae</i>)	fs-hs	fall-sp.	sp.-sum.	Another pretty weed!
Spider Plant (<i>Chlorophytum comosum</i>)	sh	spring	year-round	With good drainage, good shade ground cover or cascade. Look for “Reverse Variegated”.
Star Clusters (<i>Pentas lanceolata</i>)	sh-fs	sp.-fall	sp.-fall	Ample water. Very adaptable. Frost tender.
Statice, German (<i>Botanical name</i>)	hs	fall	win.-sum.	Strong, adaptable plant. Needs regular deadheading.
Sunflower, Maximilian’s (<i>Helianthus maximillianii</i>)	fs-hs	sp.-sum.	fall	Drought tolerant. A huge mass of golden yellow in bloom.
Umbrella Plant (<i>Cyperis alternifolius</i>)	hs-sh	sp.-fall	year-round	Steamside plant: needs ample water.
Verbena, Moss (<i>Verbena pulchella gracilior</i>)	fs-hs	fall-sp.	sp.-fall	Needs fast drainage.
Verbena, Sandpaper (<i>Verbena rigida</i>)	fs-hs	fall	sp. & fall	Needs fast drainage, a little sulfur in the soil.
Verbena, Trailing (<i>Verbena peruviana</i> hybrids)	fs-hs	spring	sp.-fall	Needs fast drainage. Forms with red blooms and/or entire leaves are insufficiently heat tolerant.
Violet, Sweet (<i>Viola odorata</i>)	sh	fall	spring	Invisible in summer.
Wandering Jew (<i>Tradescantia fluminensis</i>)	sh	spring	year-round	Good shade groundcover.
Wormwood (<i>Artemisia</i> species)	hs	fall	fall-sp.	Ragged in summer.
Yarrow (<i>Achillea</i> species)	fs-hs	fall	spring	Ragged in summer. Otherwise another pretty weed.
Yellow Dot (<i>Wedelia trilobata</i>)	fs-sh	sp.-fall	sp.-fall	Ample water. Adaptable groundcover.

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