



Timing
the
Bloom

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Northern Garden Symphony

Combining Hardy Perennials
for Blooms All Season

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A GUIDE TO: *Northern Garden Symphony*

One of the specialties of The Plant Kingdom Greenhouse and Nursery during my tenure as its owner was the extensive collection of herbaceous perennials that we offered for sale and that we grew in our display gardens. In my own experience choosing and growing plants for our display gardens and in discussions with like-minded customers developing perennial gardens of their own, I came to the realization that the concept of bloom time in perennial design was often misunderstood if not completely overlooked. It is what separates annual from perennial garden design. Considering bloom time is crucial if a perennial garden is to offer color all season long. It is the aspect of perennial garden design that is intimidating to beginning perennial gardeners and even to more seasoned gardeners, but it is also the challenge that makes perennial gardening so much fun and so rewarding.

I taught perennial design classes in the display gardens The Plant Kingdom for many years and more recently I teach through the Fairbanks Folk School in display gardens on my own property. These classes became the roots of *Northern Garden Symphony*.

The thesis of the book revolves around sequential bloom time in herbaceous perennials, but as I began writing, it soon became obvious that it was nearly impossible, if not incorrect, to address bloom time as a standalone characteristic of perennial gardening. Bloom time knits together with color

choices, repetition, growth form, bloom size and type, and positioning of plants in a perennial garden to name just a few of the interconnections. Also relevant are the aspects of perennial gardening unique to the northern climate in which my gardens are growing. And so this all became part of the book.

One of my hopes for *Northern Garden Symphony* is that it will be a manual to perennial gardening—a book that you might take into the garden with you or stack on your desk with your own gardening journal or store with your seed catalogs. I hope to see it smudged with garden soil and rain drops. Let me tell you about the three parts designed to accomplish this.

First there is the list and descriptions of approximately two hundred fifty plant varieties that are hardy at least down to USDA hardiness zone 4 and some down to 2.

Second there is the backbone of the book which is the Charts. One group of charts assort the two hundred fifty varieties and cultivars according to height, another set assort them according to flower color, and the third assort them according to bloom time. Not only do the Charts provide the answer to the question of “What is the bloom time of this plant?” but also they allow a gardener to set parameters of height, flower color and bloom time for an prospective addition to their garden, and then easily pick a variety of plants that meet that those criteria directly from the Charts. Availability of perennial varieties changes constantly as new varieties enter the market and older ones drop out. The Charts are designed with extra space at the end of each section

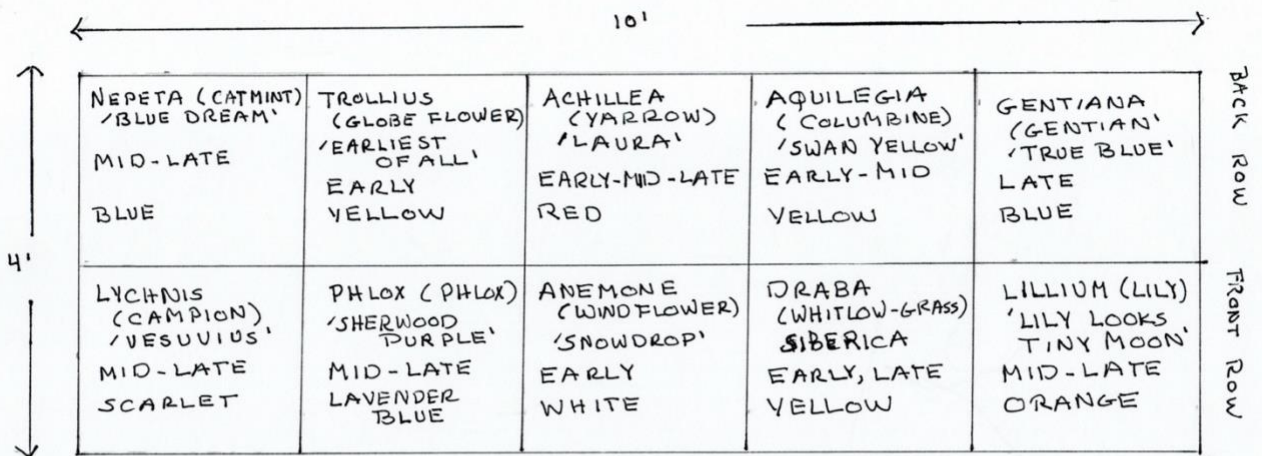
for gardeners to add varieties new to the market as well as those varieties with which they have had success, but which are not included in my list. My goal is that *Northern Garden Symphony* will grow as its readers encounter new varieties in the market and in their experience.

Thirdly, the book includes drawings and design logic for five example gardens so readers can experience the use of the Charts in garden design.

A final point I would like to add is that although I garden in Interior Alaska, the concepts and the thesis of *Northern Garden Symphony* apply to perennial gardens in any northern or temperate climate.



This is the perennial garden plan that I discussed in my presentation. There is always limited time to spend on each slide, so I am including this one here for those who may want more time to consider its content.



BACK ROW (5 PLANTS)		FRONT ROW (5 PLANTS)		ENTIRE GARDEN (10 PLANTS)	
EARLY	3	EARLY	2	EARLY	5
MID	3	MID	3	MID	6
LATE	3	LATE	4	LATE	7

COLOR DISTRIBUTION THROUGH THE SEASON

EARLY		MID		LATE	
YELLOW	3	BLUE	2	BLUE	3
RED	1	RED	2	RED	2
WHITE	1	ORANGE	1	ORANGE	1
		YELLOW	1	YELLOW	1