

Perennial Partners

Partnering perennials is similar to couples joining in hopeful harmony, the pair aspires to putting down roots and planning offshoots of their own. Their dream location is selected and soon after 'digging in' they find their union not so blissful. Harsh arguments may occur when one gets too 'big for his britches' and overshadows the partner, lesser in stature. Bliss soon goes out the window when the one who loves the sunny side of the street endures the 'north' to appease his partnering wall flower. The selection of perennials takes more than providence for their union to be successful. As in life - so in gardens. The blending and complimenting of partners is a recipe that requires preparation and thoughtful planning.

Let's have a look at a common family of five: Helianthus, Echinacea, Helenium, Salvia and Hemerocallis. This selection is a favourite grouping in many neighbourhoods as they companion well in terms of their cultural needs. Their heights when arranged appropriately are compatible

and their leaves contrast enough to demonstrate attention. A well-known combination, their varied bloom times and diverse colours complement each other. The bushiness of some parental types assist in terms of concealing raised hemlines and the bare legs of the young at heart.



In essence, this combo is a simple and happy union in a sunny spot, with soil that is less than perfect and little babysitting is necessary with the exception of the odd curfew in terms of curtailing excess blooms. These folks need little if any counselling.

Then there are the blended or extended families - those unions under the guidance of counsel. The following intermingle with curious yet appealing results, despite the caution of many well-wishers. Daring mergers of Clematis and Morning Glory raise the eyebrows of many. The

overconfident Solidago 'Fireworks' towers over his timid Hosta companion protecting her from harsh scolding from the sun. An audacious legion that totally tests onlooker's patience is the awaiting of the first sign of birth from the slow to show Hibiscus. Softened by the drive of its lesser but more exuberant ground-floor partner, Lamium, the less than punctual Hibiscus is forgiven by the rush of blushing pink surrounding her early knobby knees while she lingers.

The cool blue Nepeta enhances the heat of the sunny gold Achillea's personality. They both flatter each other until the arrival of Black Knight Monkshood, their belated companion, who takes command over the fall garden not only with his height but his demanding dark purple celebrity.

As we have experienced, various combinations of garden personalities can work if caution and thought is exercised. Keep one step ahead and have a keen eye open for unruly unions. After all, holding the trowel and spade, we have the last say in the partnering of perennials.

Anne Brolley,
Master Gardener in Training

June TO DO List

- Stake plans before they fill in (Peonies, Hydrangea).
- Apply mulch to shrub plants before they fill in
- Pinch back Artemesia, Bee Balm, Black-eyed Susans, Catmint, Purple Coneflower and Shasta Daisies to encourage busier growth
- Prune early flowering shrubs that have finished blooming (e.g. Lilacs) to encourage new growth for next year.
- Water transplants regularly until they become established
- Weed as they appear to avoid spending more time later
- Fertilize roses and other flowering plants
- Have a gardening question or need to identify a plant or pest, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

Tip of the Month:

Apply nematodes to your lawn. These awesome little microscopic critters will help prevent lawn pests. They come in pucks at greenhouses- make sure they aren't any older than a few weeks. Add water to loosen them up and apply between rains or water heavily. Late May and early June is a good time now that the temperature is consistently above 60 degrees.

Digging it!

Newsletter of the Simcoe County Ask a Master Gardener books containing answers to your most common gardening questions are available at any of these speaking engagements for only \$10 or Gardening Guides for only \$1. Valuable references for you or as gifts for a gardening friend!

Master Gardeners

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Editor Cherin Harris-Tuck



Master Gardeners of Simcoe County

Where to find us for free gardening advice!

- June 17** Simcoe County Master Gardener Meeting,
White Pine Board Room, Midhurst, 7:00 pm
- June 18** Painswick Library 48 Dean St., Greg Kalic: TBA
- June 24** The Huronia Rose Society's annual show at the South Shore Centre 7pm

May and June Q & A Sessions

Saturdays 11 - 2 Canadian Tire Garden Centre, Collingwood

Saturdays & Sundays Botanix, Alliston

All in June

*A week ago I had a fire
To warm my feet, my hands and face;
Cold winds, that never make a friend,
Crept in and out of every place.*

*Today the fields are rich in grass,
And buttercups in thousands grow;
I'll show the world where I have been--
With gold-dust seen on either shoe.*

*Till to my garden back I come,
Where bumble-bees for hours and hours
Sit on their soft, fat, velvet bums,
To wriggle out of hollow flowers.*

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For information on Master Gardeners or arranging a lecture for your group please contact Tracy Bosley at 705-435-2608 or email her at tvbosley@rogers.com.