

# MESSENGER-INQUIRER

	University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food and Environment Cooperative Extension Service
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May 31, 2025

Flowering Perennial Plants for Dry Conditions  
**Annette Meyer Heisdorffer, Ph.D.**  
**Daviness County Extension Agent for Horticulture**

As the growing season continues, the temperature increases, and often the soil becomes drier. Including some perennial plants, which return year after year, in the landscape that tolerate these growing conditions ensures some beautiful flowers. While the plants listed below tolerate dry soil conditions and require less water once their roots are established, they need to be watered during the first season. Full sun and well-drained soil are preferred unless otherwise noted.

Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) is a large perennial plant 3 to 5 feet in height, including the flower stem. Depending on the cultivar, the flowers are reddish, purple, white, or lavender-pink. It blooms from summer until frost. The flower or the cone at the center of the flower, with the petals removed, adds interest to fresh arrangements. Air dry the flower cone for dried arrangements.

Coneflower tolerates a wide range of soil conditions. Butterflies are attracted to this plant. The cultivar of the coneflower called Magnus was a Perennial Plant of the Year. The flowers of 'Magnus' are an intense rose-pink color, and the petals do not droop. This plant reaches 3 feet tall.

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An easy-to-grow perennial is *Dianthus* 'Feuerhexe' ('Firewitch'). It forms a mat sending up its fragrant, bright pink blossoms in the spring. 'Feuerhexe' gracefully spreads over retaining walls and on sloped areas. It requires little care and tolerates drought, but benefits from watering if the drought is prolonged. This plant reblooms many times as long as the seed pods are continually removed.

Blazing star, *Liatris spicata*, blooms in early summer. The 0.75-inch, fluffy, purple flowers arranged on a spike open from the top down, which is different from many other species with spike flowers that bloom from the bottom up. The plant reaches 2 to 4 feet tall and spreads about 1.5 feet. The medium green foliage is grass-like and about 12 inches long. The cultivar Kobold grows 2 feet tall and does not require staking compared to other cultivars and species of *Liatris*.

Meadow sage (*Salvia x superba* or *Salvia nemerosa*) blooms in late spring and throughout the summer. The flowers are produced on spikes. Meadow sage can tolerate heat and drought conditions. The height of this plant ranges from 18 to 24 inches. Violet, pink, and blue flower colors are available.

The cultivar May Night (Mainacht) was selected by the Perennial Plant Association as a Perennial Plant of the Year. It grows about 18 inches tall and has deep purple flowers. Another good cultivar is Blue Queen. This cultivar has pretty, intense blue-violet flowers and reaches 18 to 24 inches tall.

Russian sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*) is covered with small, lavender-blue flowers from late July through September. The tubular flowers appear along 12- to 15-inch stems produced above the foliage. The height of the plant may range from 3 to 5 feet tall depending on the

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cultivar. The gray-white foliage and the long blooming period make this plant very desirable. Also, the foliage adds winter interest to the garden. The plant can be cut back in the spring before it starts to grow. When the leaf is crushed, it has a pungent odor which reminds me of sage.

Showy sedum (*Sedum spectabile*) is a unique perennial for fall bloom. The foliage is thick and fleshy. The leaves are silvery-green in color. Plant height ranges from 18 to 24 inches tall and has a mound growth habit. The 3- to 6-inch-wide flower heads form at the end of the stems. The flower colors available include red, pink, and ivory-white. Showy sedum flowers attract butterflies, which gather nectar from the blossoms. The flowers can be used fresh or dried in floral arrangements. This low-maintenance plant needs very well-drained soil to avoid rotting. Showy sedum will grow in full sun or light shade.

Dragon's blood stonecrop (*Sedum spurium* 'Dragon's Blood') is a perennial with thick leaves considered burgundy in color. It even provides winter interest since the leaves remain on the plant throughout the winter. The low-growing sedum is 3 to 6 inches tall. It spreads 1 to 1.5 feet wide. In mid-summer through autumn, pink to red flowers about .75 inch in diameter appear above the foliage mat.

For more information about perennial plants that can tolerate the heat, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or [annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu](mailto:annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu).

Annette's Tip:

To find the plants described in the article, look locally first. Local nurseries and garden centers may carry these plants. The next place to look is in catalogs and through websites.

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## Upcoming Event:

Join us for “Know and Glow: Learn All about Lightning Bugs” in the garden on June 3 at 6:00-8:30 p.m. at the Western Kentucky Botanical Garden, 2731 West Second Street, Owensboro. This free come-and-go event for the family is presented by the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service Daviess County Office, the Green River Area Extension Master Gardener Association, and the Western Kentucky Botanical Garden. Dr. Jonathan Larson, University of Kentucky Extension Entomologist, will share his knowledge about lightning bugs during repeated presentations at 6:15 p.m., 6:45 p.m., and 7:15 p.m. Other activities include face painting, crafts, lightning bug safari close to sunset, free bug catchers, and an educational booth by the Office of the State Entomologist featuring beneficial insects and pest invaders to watch for. Be sure to bring your own lawn chair and insect repellent.

For more information, call the phone number above or click on the calendar on the Western Kentucky Botanical Garden website: [www.wkbg.org](http://www.wkbg.org).

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