

Perennials

There are more drought-tolerant perennials available to prairie gardeners than ever before – new genera, new species and new cultivars. Who had heard of Russian sage, giant fleecflower, spring adonis or culver's root in the mid-1990s?

On the opposite side of the coin, some of the older perennials, of great garden worth and dependability, are becoming increasingly difficult to find. And many of the newer introductions are largely untested in terms of hardiness on the prairies. That job generally lies with the consumer.

If you're unsure of a perennial's drought tolerance or hardiness, ask at a nursery, a Master Gardener, go on a local garden tour or join a garden club or horticultural society. The beauty of these plants, coupled with their (hopefully) perennial character and unique characteristics, makes them very worthwhile.

Yarrow, achillea (*Achillea* spp.)



Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) is a circumpolar species that has been in cultivation for many centuries. It has come a long way since the days when 'Cerise Queen' was considered the standard. If you were disappointed with its floppiness, invasive habit and lacklustre colour, get ready to embrace the more recent introductions. They're more upright and clump-like, are less likely to overrun your borders and come in striking colours.

Yarrow has flat flower heads in mid to late summer atop ferny, finely cut, aromatic, dark green foliage. Plants range from 30 to 90 cm (12–36 in.) in height. Named for the Greek hero Achilles, who is said to have used *Achillea* to heal his soldiers' wounds, the species name, *millefolium*, means a thousand leaves and refers to the fine foliage.



Peonies with single or anemone type flowers have a charm all their own. And they're much less likely to bend over in the mud when it rains.



'Paprika' is a recent yarrow (*A. millifolium*) introduction that is more clump-like and less invasive than the older types.



An old fashioned perennial with white, button-like flowers, sneezewort (*A. ptarmica*) was once used as snuff.

'Anthea' is 60 cm (24 in.) in height and spread, with soft yellow, 8 to 12 cm (3–5 in.) flower heads.

'Apricot Delight' is a newer, largely untested variety that is worthy of trial, with a compact form, 30 cm (12 in.) in height and spread and pale apricot to near red flowers.

'Credo' is a creamy lemon-yellow of 75 to 90 cm (30–36 in.).

'Fire King' is a deep carmine red, 60 cm (24 in.) in height.

'Paprika,' part of the Galaxy series, is the same height but has yellow-centred flowers, blooming midsummer to fall, of the same rich colour as the spice, atop dark green foliage.

'Summer Berries,' a new introduction largely untested on the prairies but worthy of trial, resembles 'Summer Pastels' but with a blend of deeper, brighter, non-fading colours.

'Summer Pastels,' an All-America Selections winner, is 60 cm (24 in.) in height with flowers in pink, rose, apricot, cream, red, beige, purple or white.

'Terracotta' is the colour of a terracotta clay pot and is 75 to 90 cm (30–36 in.) in height.

CARE: Grow in full sun on well-drained soils. Older varieties spread readily by rhizomes and will need control (with a sharp spade!) within a border. Divide every three to four years. Deadhead for a neater appearance and more continuous bloom.

USE: This long-flowering perennial can be used massed, as a tall ground cover, for naturalizing, in the perennial border and in fresh and dried arrangements. It is a nectar plant for butterflies.

Sneezewort (*A. ptarmica*) is an excellent but slightly shorter substitute for the mostly banned baby's breath (*Gypsophila paniculata*). Sneezewort has graced our gardens for centuries. Its roots and leaves were once used as a cheap replacement for snuff (*ptarmica* is the Greek word for sneezing), thus the common name.

Native to Europe and Asia and naturalized in North America, sneezewort is covered with hundreds of tiny, double, pure white flowers in July and August on 45 to 60 cm (18–24 in.) stems. The foliage is fern-like and somewhat pungent.

'Angel's Breath' has large, double, white flowers and is 50 cm (20 in.) in height.

'Perry's White' is a double white, 60 cm (24 in.) in height.

'The Pearl' is very similar to 'Perry's White'.

CARE: Plant in full sun on poorer, well-drained soils. In richer soils it is invasive. Divide every three to four years. It may occasionally get powdery mildew.

USE: Sneezewort is useful in informal borders and for naturalizing, as well as in fresh and dried flower arrangements.

Dwarf woolly yarrow (*A. tomentosa*) is an ideal plant for hot, dry areas where the going is tough. *Tomentosa* means hairy or woolly and like the common name refers to the foliage, which is aromatic, finely cut and a soft woolly grey. The flowers are yellow and produced in flat clusters just above the foliage in June. A low (15–20 cm/6–8 in.) ground cover, its leaves form a dense mat.

A. tomentosa var. *Aurea* has more intensely golden flowers.

CARE: Plant in full sun in well-drained soil on a hot, dry site.

USE: Woolly yarrow is excellent as a ground cover, edging, for interplanting among paving stones towards the edges of a walk or patio or in a rock garden. It is easily mowed for a neater appearance or rejuvenation in midsummer after flowering.

Spring adonis (*Adonis vernalis*)

My first experience growing spring adonis was from seed. I sowed all ten seeds from the packet outdoors in a cold frame in the fall. The following spring, two germinated. A lazy gardener, I left both the tiny seedlings and the remainder of the ungerminated seeds where they were, which proved to be more good luck than good management. The seedlings grew strong enough to transplant the following spring, when the remaining eight seeds germinated. I later read that it often takes two winters before germination occurs.

They have since proved to be exceptional perennials – lovely to behold in early spring with their buttercup-like flowers, long-lived, perfectly hardy and almost no maintenance. I've seen them growing with utter abandon in a public garden cared for by the local horticultural society in Dawson Creek. I had planted mine in shade and ensured they had even moisture, but these were growing in full sun with little or no supplemental water.

Unfortunately, they are not easy to obtain, either as plants or seed and may take a bit of work sourcing. They are indeed worth the effort, however, and should be much more widely available.

The genus is named for the Greek god Adonis, well known



Dwarf woolly yarrow (*Achillea tomentosa*) is ideal as a ground cover or in a rock garden.



Spring adonis (*Adonis vernalis*) is hardy, lovely, long lived and drought-tolerant, but often difficult to source. Nag your local supplier.



Spring adonis (*Adonis vernalis*) blooms early and does well in sun or shade.



Goutweed (*Aegopodium podagraria* var. *variegatum*) is useful as a ground cover, but place it carefully – where it can be contained between a rock and a hard place.

for his good looks, who was changed into this flower after being killed by a wild boar. *Vernalis* means of spring, when they flower. They are native to southeast and central Europe through to Siberia.

The small plants form clumps 20 to 30 cm (8–12 in.) in height. The golden, buttercup-like flowers are held on unbranched stems. The foliage is finely divided with a fine, ferny appearance.

CARE: Plant in sun or shade on a variety of soils. Good drainage is preferred. Once established, they do not transplant well (although they will self-seed), so choose your location carefully.

USE: Use them in rock gardens or at the front of the border.

Goutweed, bishop's goutweed

(*Aegopodium podagraria* var. *variegatum*)

This is the first perennial you're taught to hate when you join a garden club or horticultural society. If it can be contained, however, by cement walks or other impervious barriers, it is very useful as a ground cover on shady slopes or other inhospitable sites. It's far too invasive for a border and you will deeply regret placing it there.

The species name is from the Latin *podagricus* and means used in treating gout or arthritis, presumably an occupational hazard of bishops of the time, perhaps for reasons of diet and lack of exercise. Native to Europe, it is deep-rooted and persistent. Although it wilts during periods of heat and drought, it recoups immediately with the onset of cooler temperatures and moisture. Its compound leaves with variegated white margins remain attractive throughout the growing season. Small white flowers are produced in midsummer in umbels above the dense foliage, which is 30 to 38 cm (12–15 in.) in height. On drier sites it may be shorter.

CARE: Goutweed will grow anywhere but is best planted in poor soil in full sun or partial shade. It is extremely aggressive and will overpower less vigorous neighbours. Remove any shoots that revert to green. It may brown in dry sun. Mow if it appears untidy.

USE: Goutweed is excellent as a ground cover where it can be contained (between a driveway and a sidewalk), where nothing else will grow (such as under a deck), as an understory below large trees or to hold a slope. It will certainly brighten a shady corner. Do not use it in a border or rock garden.

Giant hyssop (*Agastache foeniculum*)

Native to the prairies, giant hyssop is a member of the mint family, which is characterized by square stems and opposite leaves. Of the many hyssops available to the gardening public in recent decades, this is one of the few that is hardy on the prairies, albeit sometimes short-lived. Others are “treated as annuals” with high hopes that they will perpetuate themselves through reseeding.

Sometimes called the anise hyssop, its medium green, oval leaves are anise-scented and have been the basis of a tea. Numerous spikes have whorls of two-lipped blue flowers with bracts tinged with violet, somewhat resembling a bottle brush (similar to *Stachys lanata*). The flowers are produced on 1 to 1.2 m (3–4 ft) plants from July to September.

‘Blue Fortune’ is a hybrid of *Agastache foeniculum* and *A. rugosa*, bred and selected at Arboretum Trompenberg in the Netherlands. It blooms over a long period. The foliage has the scent of licorice. Largely untested on the prairies, it is worthy of trial in a protected location.

‘Golden Jubilee,’ a 2003 All-America Selections winner, has similar parentage. The leaves are lime-green to chartreuse. It overwinters in warmer regions of the prairies and self-seeds everywhere.

CARE: Place in full sun and well-drained soil. Allow to moderately reseed.

USE: Useful in borders, herb gardens and for cutting, it attracts bees, butterflies and hummingbirds.



Agastache ‘Golden Jubilee’ has blue flowers and lime-green to chartreuse foliage. Best to deadhead to prevent prodigious self-seeding.

Windflower, snowdrop anemone (*Anemone sylvestris*)



Native to Europe, snowdrop anemones produce single, pure white, nodding flowers in early spring. It is lovely, but place with caution. Once at home, it is difficult to dislodge. The plants are up to 40 cm (15 in.) in height, with attractive foliage.

‘Flore Pleno’ is a double form that resembles a white pom-pom chrysanthemum. It is equally tough.

CARE: Windflower will grow in sun or shade in a wide range of soils.

USE: It self-seeds too readily to be part of a formal border and is best left to naturalize in an area where it can reseed without becoming invasive: under birch, apple or plum trees or in a wild or shade garden. It is excellent as a ground cover.



A wonderful ground cover in sun or shade, windflower or snowdrop anemone (*Anemone sylvestris*) is far too invasive for a border.



Pussytoes (*Antennaria aprica*) is a diminutive, mat-forming native perennial with soft grey foliage and white flowers – an excellent pavement planting.



'Compinke' rockcress (*Arabis arendsii*) has white or pink flowers, is easy to grow from seed, and is ideal for rock gardens.

----- **Pussytoes, antennaria (*Antennaria* spp.)** 

Pussytoes forms a low, woolly, grey green mat of 5 to 8 cm (2–3 in.) with pink flowers in June. Several species (such as *Antennaria aprica*) are native to the prairies, where both pink- and white-flowered forms are found and are well worth growing if you can find them in your pasture or at a specialty native plant nursery.

But it is the European species (*A. dioica*) that is generally commercially available.

Antennaria is from the Greek word for antennae. The male flowers, produced on separate plants, have fine, short hairs with swollen tips similar to antennae.

A. aprica is a white species more commonly found in the wild.

A. dioica 'Rubra' forms a prostrate ground cover, 10 to 15 cm (4–6 in.) in height, with soft silver foliage and wine-red flowers in June and July.

CARE: Plant in well-drained soil in full sun. It spreads by stolons and needs dividing and replanting every few years. Deadhead after flowering.

USE: Often used in dry bouquets, pussytoes is planted in rock gardens and among paving stones along an informal path as a "pavement planting."

----- **Arabis, rockcress (*Arabis caucasica*, syn. *A. albida*)** 

Arabis is a long-lived addition to the spring garden that's easy to grow from seed. It is covered with masses of tiny white or pink flowers in May which practically conceal the soft grey green evergreen foliage. A member of the mustard family and native to southeastern Europe, Turkey and Iran, arabis is a trailing, mat-forming plant, only 15 to 20 cm (6-8 in.) in height.

Rockcress is available in both white and pink forms.

'Compinkie' (*A. arendsii*) is light to dark pink, 15 to 20 cm (6–8 in.) in height.

'Plena' is fully double, sterile, long blooming and produces no seedlings.

'Rosea,' with a height and spread of 15 by 30 cm (6 x 12 in.), has light pink flowers.

'Snowcap' is a single, white-flowered cultivar of 30 cm (12 in.) or less.

'Snow White' has single white flowers.

Variiegated forms are useful for their foliage but are less floriferous and usually less vigorous. They may die on you for no apparent reason.

A. caucasica 'Variegata' has green and creamy-white leaves but is prone to reverting back to green. If this happens, the green parts should be removed.

A. ferdinandi-coburgi 'Variegata' with white flowers, is worthy of trial in protected locations but suffers from dieback in colder areas of the prairies.

CARE: Plant in full sun to partial shade in well-drained soil. For a tidier look, shear after flowering. Flea beetles may be a problem in areas where canola is grown.

USE: Arabis is ideal for rock gardens, slopes, edging, the front of the perennial border, as a ground cover or as a pavement planting. Plant it where you will enjoy the fragrance. It is a food source for butterfly larvae.

Mountain sandwort (*Arenaria montana*)

It is nice to see that a few seed houses and nurseries carry this lesser-known plant. *Arenaria* is from the Latin word *arena* (where sports are played), which means sand. Its natural habitat – the Alps – should tell us something about its need for sharp drainage.

It is related to pinks (*Dianthus*) but its flowers resemble those of snow-in-summer, although its habit is more contained and its form is almost pillow-like. It produces pure white flowers above a grey green mat-like cushion, 20 cm (8 in.) in height, in early spring.

'Avalanche' has moss-like foliage and white flowers.

'Grandiflora' has needle-like foliage with large white flowers.

CARE: Place in full sun and well-drained soil.

USE: Plant in rock gardens or allow to cascade over low walls.

Thrift (*Armeria* spp.)



Common thrift (*Armeria maritima*), native to coastal cliffs of Europe and therefore salt tolerant, is easy to grow and was once used medicinally to treat a wide range of problems, including obesity. It has pink flowers in late spring. Many cultivars have been selected from the species, but the species is longer lived and more dependable.

'Alba' is white.



Rockcress (*Arabis caucasica*) needs only full sun and well drained soil to live for many years.



An early spring bloomer, mountain sandwort (*Arenaria montana*) has a cushion-like form and white flowers above grey-green foliage.



Thrift (*Armeria* spp.), native to the coastal cliffs of Europe, has white or pink flowers and works well in a rock garden or the front of a border.



'Silver Brocade' (*Artemisia stelleriana*) is well behaved, with deeply lobed silver grey leaves and great drought tolerance.

'Dusseldorf Pride' is a deep reddish-pink with larger flowers.

'Nifty Thrifty' has variegated green-and-white foliage with pink flowers but hasn't been widely tested on the prairies.

'Rubrifolia' has burgundy foliage in spring that later turns to green and magenta-pink flowers.

'Splendens' has bright rose flowers over low mounds of grassy foliage.

'Vesuvius' sports dark purple foliage and bright pink flowers.

Spanish thrift (*A. juniperifolia*) is native to Spain and forms tight hummocks or cushions with evergreen juniper-like foliage and almost stemless soft pink flowers in the spring.

'Laucheana' sea thrift, a cultivar of *A. lauchenana* 'Splendens,' has pink flowers above grassy foliage.

CARE: Plant in full sun in very well-drained soil. Deadhead for prolonged bloom.

USE: Use in rock gardens, as edging, at the front of the border and in containers.

Artemisia, sage (*Artemisia* spp.)



Here is a diverse genus containing perennials as well as shrubs. Among them are ornamental garden plants, culinary species and the notorious absinthe. Most are grown for their aromatic silver foliage with its sage-like smell. The flowers are generally inconspicuous. The genus was named after the Greek goddess of chastity, Artemis.

Silver sage (*Artemisia ludoviciana*) is an upright plant, 60 to 75 cm (24–30 in.) in height and grown primarily for its foliage. The species name, *ludoviciana*, means of Louisiana, one of the areas where it is found in North America.

'Silver King' has attractive but undivided grey foliage and a bushy, upright form, 60 to 90 cm (24–36 in.) in height.

'Silver Queen' is 75 cm (30 in.) in height with slightly wider, pointed leaves with a deeply cut, jagged, irregular margin. It is invasive and is best used for naturalizing.

'Valerie Finnis' is a more recent introduction, largely untested on the prairies, with broad leaves and a compact form, 45 to 60 cm (18–24 in.) in height. It is perhaps less aggressive. Cut back for a neater appearance if it sprawls.

CARE: Silver sages tolerate poor, sandy soils, drought and full sun. They spread by stolons.

USE: Naturalize in areas where other plants simply will not grow. In a border they are too invasive unless physically contained. The foliage is useful in dried arrangements.

'Silver Mound' artemisia (*A. schmidtiana*) forms a compact, mound-like plant, 30 cm (12 in.) in height with a spread of 45 cm (18 in.). It seldom stirs from where it was originally planted. The foliage is soft, finely cut and almost misty silver grey, with typical sage-like fragrance.

CARE: It does well in sandy, well-drained soils in full sun and is quite drought tolerant. When grown in shade or under more fertile conditions or with too much water, it tends to lose its compact form. It may be sheared in midsummer for a neater appearance and to remove the unattractive seed heads. It occasionally dies out for no apparent reason.

USE: 'Silver Mound' is excellent in rock gardens, as an edging plant and towards the front of the perennial border.

'Silver Brocade' artemisia (*A. stelleriana*, syn. 'Boughton Silver'), although native to northeast Asia, is naturalized over parts of North America. It was named for the German naturalist Georg Wilhelm Stellar (1709–1746), who brought it from Siberia. 'Silver Brocade' was introduced by the University of British Columbia Botanical Garden. It is a low (15–30 cm/6–12 in.), compact selection with deeply lobed, silver grey leaves. It thrives in heat and almost gleams at dusk.

CARE: Plant in full sun in well-drained soils. To prevent self-seeding, shear plants after flowering, before seeds set.

USE: It is extremely useful for edging, as a ground cover in difficult, dry situations, for naturalizing, to hold slopes and in pots or hanging baskets.

Swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*) 

For a plant with the common name of swamp milkweed, this one is exceedingly drought tolerant and vigorous in the driest of situations. I can only imagine it in a swamp. Native from Nova Scotia to southeastern Saskatchewan, its genus name is from the Greek *asklepios*, the god of medicine, referring to its ancient medicinal properties, while *incarnata* means flesh pink and describes the flowers.



A. ludoviciana has attractive silver leaves and varies from 60 to 75 cm (24–30 in.). It is an aggressive plant best suited for naturalizing in difficult situations.



'Silver Mound' (*A. schmidtiana*) is refined and well behaved. If you let it spend the summer in a container, be sure to overwinter it in a ground bed.



'Cinderella' (*Asclepias incarnata*) is amazingly drought tolerant for a plant with the common name of swamp milkweed. Its flowers are a dusty rose pink.



Easy to grow from seed and long lived, perennial alyssum (*Aurinia saxatilis*) blooms for four weeks or more in late spring.

Showy white or pink flowers are borne on 60 to 90 cm (2–3 ft) stems in early summer above 8–15 cm (3–6 in.) alternate leaves.

'Carmine Rose' has rose-pink flowers.

'Cinderella' is a dusty rose-pink.

'Ice Ballet' is white.

'Milkmaid' has white flowers.

'Soulmate' has white flowers with rose pink bracts.

CARE: Swamp milkweed is very adaptable to varying soil and moisture conditions. Plant in full sun. It will spread if conditions are to its liking.

USE: This is an important food source for the larvae of monarch butterflies. It is a good border plant, cut flower and bog plant.

----- **Basket-of-gold, perennial alyssum (*Aurinia saxatilis*)** 

Producing a mass of gold each spring, alyssum is easily grown from seed and will live for several decades if given full sun and well-drained soil. Originally named *Alyssum saxatile* by Linnaeus in 1752, alyssum is native to Europe and Asia Minor. *Aurinia* is Latin for golden and refers to the flowers. *Saxatilis* means growing among rocks and alludes to its native habitat.

It is a low, mound-like plant of 25 to 30 cm (10–12 in.) with a spread of 30 to 60 cm (12–24 in.). Its grey green leaves are covered with masses of golden-yellow flowers for four to six weeks in May and June.

'Citrinum' has lemon-yellow flowers on a more compact plant, 30 to 38 cm (12–15 in.) in height. It is shorter lived than the species.

'Compactum' is a dwarf form of 20 cm (8 in.).

CARE: Full sun and good drainage are essential. The species has greater longevity than the cultivars. Shear after flowering for a neater appearance. Do not overfertilize.

USE: Alyssum is ideal for perennial borders, rock gardens, as a ground cover or among paving stones or patio bricks.

----- **False indigo, wild blue indigo (*Baptisia australis*)**

An extract from the flowers was once used as a substitute for the blue dye indigo, hence the common and genus names – *Baptisia* comes from the Greek word meaning to dye. *Australis*

means south and presumably refers to part of its native habitat in the southeastern United States.

A legume, false indigo has blue, pea-like flowers that bloom in May and June and somewhat resemble lupines. The inflated seed pods that follow are black, curled and decorative. It is about 1 m (3 ft) in height, with an arching, upright form. The trifoliolate blue green leaves are compound and remain attractive until hard frost. It is long-lived, with thick, strong roots, but may take several years to develop and come into bloom. It is best placed in a protected location.

‘Solar Flare’ is a new, largely untested open-pollinated hybrid worthy of trial in protected locations. The flowers open lemon-yellow, changing to a rusty orange blush..

CARE: Plant in full sun on well-drained soil. It does not tolerate root disturbance once established.

USE: Use in perennial or mixed borders, as a specimen plant and in wild gardens. Both the flowers and seed pods are used in arrangements. It is a nectar plant for butterflies.

Heart-leaved bergenia, pigsqueak (*Bergenia cordifolia*)



Here is a workhorse of a perennial that requires little on the part of the gardener, propagates readily from division, lives for decades and has a long season of interest. Named after Karl August von Bergen (1704–1768), a Frankfurt botany professor, bergenia was introduced into Europe from Siberia in the seventeenth century. *Cordifolia* means heart-shaped and describes the leaves. If rubbed between your thumb and forefinger, the leaves make a sound like the squeak of a pig, thus the common name.

The 30 cm (12 in.) spikes of pink to purple flowers are produced in May. The large, handsome, leathery, evergreen leaves (which turn a reddish bronze in autumn) resemble waxy cabbage leaves. Depending on growing conditions and weather, the flowers are produced either above or within the foliage. The root is thick and deep.

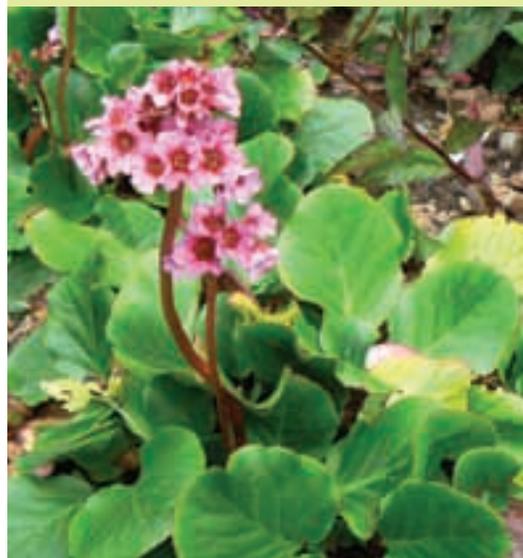
A number of cultivars are available, varying from white to almost red flowers, but these are not as hardy, robust or long lived as the species. Most are hybrids developed in Europe from less-hardy parentage. Among them are the Bressingham hybrids, which might do best in a more protected location.

‘Eroica’ was selected for its beet-red fall foliage.

Bergenia crassifolia, native from Siberia to northwest China, is similar to *B. cordifolia* but with slightly smaller, spoon-shaped leaves and flowers that are held higher above the foliage. It is not as hardy and is less robust.



False indigo (*Baptisia australis*) has startling blue flowers in May and June that were once used as a dye.



Heart-leaved bergenia (*Bergenia cordifolia*) is a workhorse of a perennial – hardy, drought tolerant, long lived and at home in sun or shade.



'Eroica' bergenia (*B. cordifolia*) was selected for its outstanding bright red fall foliage.



'Skinner's Golden' bromegrass (*Bromus inermis*) is a great plant for naturalizing but far too aggressive for a border.

B. stracheyi 'Pink Dragonfly' has narrower foliage and a finer texture. Largely untested, it is best placed in a protected location.

CARE: Extremely adaptable, bergenia is equally at home in full sun or shade and dry or moist soil. It is easily propagated by division. Divide every four years to prevent overcrowding.

USE: It is used in perennial borders, rock gardens, as an edging plant, underplantings below trees, a ground cover, a waterside planting and in arrangements.

'Skinner's Golden' bromegrass



(*Bromus inermis* 'Skinner's Golden')

The species, introduced from Europe, is widely planted as a pasture crop and has escaped from cultivation in much of North America. 'Skinner's Golden' was selected near Dropmore, Manitoba for its bright yellow-with-green variegated foliage. It is about 60 cm (24 in.) in height, with a graceful, arching form.

CARE: For the best colour, grow in full sun in ordinary soil. Remove any sections that revert to green. It is a cool-season grass that performs best in early summer and fall. Mow or clip if it becomes ragged during the heat of midsummer.

USE: Mass plant as a transition area between the manicured area of a rural yard and surrounding bush or use it to hold a bank or slope or as a ground cover. If placed in the border, it must be contained, as it spreads rapidly by rhizomes. Remember, bromegrasses are vigorous and aggressive and the burden of responsible placement lies with the gardener.

Bellflower (*Campanula* spp.)

With our sunny days and cool nights, bellflowers do very well on the prairies. *Campanula* is Latin for small bell and describes the bell-like flowers, generally available in blue and white.

Carpathian bellflower (*Campanula carpatica*) is dependable, moderately long-lived, easily grown from seed and adaptable in use and habitat. The species name, *carpatica*, indicates its origin, the Carpathian Mountains. The blue, upfacing flowers, 2.5 to 5 cm (1–2 in.) in diameter, bloom for a long period in midsummer. They are held above a neat, compact mound of dark green foliage of 30 cm (12 in.).

'Blue Clips' has blue flowers and a compact form.

'Deep Blue Clips' has a darker shade of violet-blue flowers.

'White Clips' is similar with white flowers.

CARE: Grow in full sun or partial shade on well-drained soil. Deadheading prolongs bloom.

USE: Carpathian bellflowers are ideal for the front of the border, rock gardens and edging.

Dwarf bellflower (*C. cochleariifolia*, syn. *C. pusilla*), a diminutive perennial from the mountains of Europe, is a lot tougher than it looks. The bright green foliage, only 8 to 10 cm (3–4 in.) in height, is almost hidden by a myriad of tiny, outfacing, bell-like blue flowers in June and July. It spreads rapidly by creeping rhizomes, soon forming a solid mat, but is easily controlled.

'Alba' is a white form.

'Bavarian White' has single flowers.

'R. B. Loder' has double, soft blue flowers that fade to white.

CARE: Grow in sun or partial shade in well-drained soil.

USE: This is an excellent plant for edging, rock gardens, ground covers, pavement plantings, cascading over walls, in crevices and on garden steps.

Weather thistle (*Carlina acaulis* subsp. *simplex*)



This is one of the weirder looking but intriguing perennials you are apt to come across. It's a plant that invites comments, but finding it may be a problem.

The genus name arose in the Middle Ages when Charlemagne (Carolina) used this thistle in an attempt to treat the plague that was decimating his soldiers. The common name is derived from the fact that the flowers close on a cloudy day. Native to Europe and the Alps, it has been grown in British gardens since 1640.

Low, with a height and spread of 30 cm (12 in.), short-stemmed and thistle-like, it has bronzy-green, pinnately lobed foliage and enormous white-purple flowers with showy, dry, silvery bracts in late summer.

CARE: Plant in a hot, dry but sheltered location. Once established, it is long lived but does not transplant easily due to its deep taproot.

USE: Use in rock or gravel gardens and as a cut flower.



'Blue Clips' is one of the most popular cultivars of the Carpathian bellflower (*Campanula carpatica*) and does equally well in sun or partial shade.



The weather thistle (*Carlina acaulis* subsp. *simplex*) always elicits comments with its enormous papery flower on such a short stem.



The lovely blue papery flowers of cupid's dart (*Catananche caerulea*) were once believed to have aphrodisiac properties.

Cupid's dart (*Catananche caerulea*)

The Greeks were said to have used cupid's dart as an aphrodisiac (which accounts for its common name). It was later used to symbolize a purer sort of love. Native to the dry meadows of southern Europe, it is a short-lived perennial but blooms its first year from seed.

The basal foliage is grey and woolly, about 45 to 70 cm (18–28 in.) in height, forming a neat clump. The papery, daisy-like flowers, 5 cm (2 in.) in diameter, are somewhat like a cornflower, a lovely blue with a darker blue centre and prominent darker veins. They are borne on long stems in midsummer. The flower buds are silvery.

'Alba' is white.

'Bicolour' has white petals marked with flecks of metallic blue.

'Major' has lavender-blue flowers.

CARE: Plant in full sun in well-drained soil. Keep on the dry side. In colder areas of the prairies, place in a protected location.

USE: Use as cut flowers and in borders.



Although grown primarily for the cut flower market, globe centaurea (*Centaurea macrocephala*) is also well placed toward the back of a perennial border.

Centaurea (*Centaurea* spp.)

Globe centaurea (*Centaurea macrocephala*)  is generally grown for the cut or dried flower market and is undervalued as a taller perennial for the border. The genus is named for the mythical Greek centaurs, creatures with the lower body of a horse and upper torso of a man, who were said to have used this plant medicinally.

Native to Armenia and the Caucasus Mountains, globe centaurea is easily identified by the overlapping paper-like brown bracts below the petals. *Macrocephala* means large head, a reference to the large (8–10 cm/3–4 in. diameter) yellow, thistle-like flowers borne in late summer through fall. Up to 1.2 m (4 ft) in height, the plants are rather coarse, with long, wavy, green leaves.

NOTE: This is a prohibited noxious weed in Alberta.

CARE: Grow in full sun in well-drained soil. It resents disturbance once established. Deadhead to prevent unwanted seedlings.

USE: Place at the back of perennial or mixed borders, use as specimen plants or mass in large groups. It is used in both fresh and dried arrangements.

Perennial cornflower (*C. montana*) has graced prairie gardens