

### Herbaceous Planting for Late Summer Colour

Herbaceous planting for late summer colour comes with two strong themes attached; Prairie planting and Hot/Exotic planting. Both are part of the relatively modern trend that takes us away from formal planting and looks to nature for inspiration.

#### Prairie Planting:

Prairie Planting is based upon the age old idea of incorporating woodland, meadow and other feral environments into a garden. Instead of using native plants, Prairie Planting takes plants from the open grasslands of North America or those that evoke that scene. The forbears of Prairie planting can be seen in Beth Chatto's Dry Garden, but the idea has been taken to its zenith by Piet Oudof. In its purest form Prairie Planting blurs the boundaries in the garden allowing some plants to die off and others



to become more prominent. Self seeding is encouraged and tough, drought resistant plants come to the fore. The garden plan is kept together by colour themes and feature plants and once the garden is established, cultivation should be limited to the weeding out of pernicious visitors and cutting back of over zealous friends. When taken to its extremes, Prairie Planting is breathtaking, but most gardeners - especially those of us with a small patch - would find it hard to be so brave, instead, we can harvest ideas and

produce our own, manageable versions.

#### Plants for the Prairie

The following plants would sit well in a 'Prairie' theme. They all like deep, free draining soil and plenty of sun.



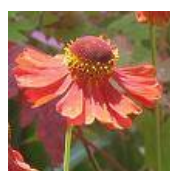
*Achillea sp., Yarrow.* Silver-green stems and feathery leaves support flat cushions of flower through summer and early autumn. Colours start as bright reds, pinks and yellows then fade through winter.  
 H 50-100cm

Echinacea sp, *Coneflower*. This plant evokes the prairie like no other. From the clump of ovate leaves come many tall daisy shaped flowers with dark, cone shaped centres and faded purple or white petals that point down to give a rocket like appearance. H 60-150cm



Echinops sp, *Globe Thistle*. As the common name suggests, this plant has spiny foliage and beautiful faded blue balls of flower that stay on the plant until rough winter weather or a keen secateur removes them. Like the Eryngium (below), this plant makes for great bones for a border. H 50cm – 2m

Eryngium sp, *Sea Holly*. Striking leaves of silver, purple and green and a spiny flower cone make this spiky plant a fantastic architectural piece. The flowers arrive in summer and the tough, dried plant will make a statement all through autumn and winter. H 60 - 150cm



Helianthus cultivars, *Sneezeweed*. Another classic for the prairie gardener, this tall daisy flower has a large domed centre and shapely petals. Colours take on burnt or washed out yellow, orange and red, but faded it is not. H 50-150cm

Kniphofia sp, *Red Hot Poker*. Be it 40cm or 2m tall, this plant will make an impact. The hot orange and red pokers of flower bring drama and light to a border. This plant is happy in many settings and is a must for late summer colour, so never mind the untidy, strappy leaves!



Monarda cultivars, *Bergamot*. The ragged pompom flowers of the Monarda are soft and dusky and would warm the heart of any lonesome prairie dog. Control the mildew and you'll have a magnificent clump of late summer flower. H 90cm

Perovskia 'Blue Spire', *Russian Sage*. Glaucus, feathery foliage supports a tall spire of soft blue flowers. When planted en masse a cool mist of blue is produced. Russian Sage is a great foil for other plants as well as a beautiful individual. H 1.2m



Rudbeckia sp, *Coneflower*. The orange or yellow Rudbeckia shares many characteristics with Echinacea with which it was originally grouped. Redbeckia is another true prairie plant and therefore sits well in this context. H 30-90cm

*Sedum spectabile*, *Ice Plant*. 'Autumn Joy' is probably the best cultivar for prairie planting. Soft mounds of flower sit above fleshy, glaucous foliage. The flowers are deep pink when new and fade to brown through the winter. Great at the front of the border or in a pot. H 50cm



*Verbena bonariensis*. Small purple caps of flower perch on stems so tall and slender they are almost invisible. The effect is a sea of purple cushions through which the rest of the border can be seen. H 2m

*V. rigida*. Very similar to *V. bonariensis*, but at less than half the height, it makes for a perfect container plant. H 45-60cm

## Grasses

A Prairie wouldn't be a prairie without grasses and there are some fantastic ones to choose from. Grasses add height and movement and, when planted in a drift, lead your eye to the distance. They are often beautiful in their own right, but I think grasses are best planted with other, more floriferous plants where their subtle sway and soft silhouette enhance both. Let your grasses stand through the winter and they will reward you and your garden all the more.

*Briza* sp, *Quaking Grass*. The delicate stems and large seed heads produce the nodding dance of this beautiful little grass and the size makes it ideal for a pot. *B. media* is perennial, whilst *B. maxima* and *minor* are self seeding annuals. H 40-60cm



*Carex buechananii* & *comans* 'Bronze'. These grasses produce a thick clump of arching, warm, brown leaves and spikes of darker brown seed. The dried out, sun bleached appearance enhances the prairie look and the colour will break up the border. H 20-70cm

*Cortaderia selloana*, *Pampas Grass*. For some this plant sums up all that was wrong with 1970's planting, but it is making a comeback and rightly so. When used well, the huge plumes on this massive, dramatic grass make a statement like no other – but do you like the statement that it makes? H 1.5-3m



*Miscanthus sinensis*. This deciduous grass comes in many forms, but all produce tall, erect foliage and big, silky sprays of seed spike that are often tinted purple. Some have horizontal stripes on the foliage and, like many grasses, they move beautifully in the breeze. H 1-4m

*Molinia caerulea*. An often bronze tinted grass with upright seed stems. This grass will be happy in a slightly shaded position.  
H 40 – 200cm



*Pennisetum* sp. A grass grown for its long, soft, fox tails of seed, *Pennisetum* is a beautiful grass for the front or middle of a border or a pot. The plumes of seed range from straw like yellow to deepest purple.  
H 60 – 150cm

*Stipa* sp. My favorite grass genus for its range and beauty. *Stipa*'s all display large feathery seed heads and are slight enough to sway in the breeze. The best are *S. tenuissima* with its soft mist of seeds, *S. arundinacea* for its arching habit and huge, translucent plumes and *S. calamagrostis* for its tinted fireworks of seed.



*Uncinia rubra*. A low growing grass that has broad, bronze leaves and short, tufted seed heads. Its size makes it ideal for a small bed or container, but watch the barbs on the seed heads! H 30cm

### Hot and Exotic Planting:

The hot border was invented (if any planting scheme can be) by Christopher Lloyd (pictured) at Great Dixter. Much to the disgust of more traditional gardeners, Lloyd and his head gardener Fergus Garrett, ripped out the formal, Edwin Lutyens rose garden and replaced it with an 'Exotic Garden'. Here perennials and annuals are mixed to produce a border that evokes the childhood image of a jungle. Unlike Prairie Planting, which is subtle and calm, a hot border should be intense and exhilarating; it should also take a lot more time to perfect. The use of annuals intensive, but London garden the ground, plants should flowers; the big on a Canna will



and tender perennials make it far more labour the results are worth it and in a sheltered, many of the more tender plants can be left in eliminating a lot of the work. In a hot border, be chosen as much for their foliage as for their dark leaves of Dahlias or the dramatic stripes enhance the feeling of the tropics. A banana, with its massive rubbery leaves, would add more drama still.



## Herbaceous Perennials for the Hot Border

Most of these plants have their origins in climates that are warmer than ours. Plant them in a sheltered position away from strong winds that will shred large leaves.



Aster sp. This genus incorporates about 250 species and is truly the King of the Daisies! Asters have small leaves and produce clouds of flower in every possible colour. A winner for late summer colour, but watch the mildew. Heights range from 20-150cm

Canna sp, *Indian Shot Plant*. A plant that screams 'Tropical' from its fleshy roots to its molten flowers. The broad, rubbery leaves whorl round the thick stem on which sits a flower of intense red, orange or yellow. With strong colour on both the leaves and flowers, this plant really makes a statement and is a must for the hot look. H 0.6m – 2m



Chrysanthemum sp. Chrysanthums range in style from subtle single daisies to outrageous overblown pompoms. Go for your favourite as long as it's shocking pink or hot orange! Heights range from 20cm – 2m

Crococsmia sp, *montbretia*. From within the long strappy leaves come tall stems atop with flaming flowers. Subtle yellows are available, but hot red and orange are desirable. Another must have for a hot border. H 50-100cm



Dahlia cultivars. Dahlias come in varying degrees of absurdity and like Chrysanthemums you should choose whichever style you like best. The cultivars with dark foliage and intense flowers work well as both parts add to the hot/tropical theme. H 80 – 140cm

Gaillardia sp, *Blanket Flower*. Big, exotic looking, daisy shaped flowers come in burnt red, canary yellow or, better still, both. The flowers sit above hairy, mid green leaves all summer long and provide some depth of colour amongst the taller plants. H 45-90cm



Gazania cultivars. Incredibly bright, exotic looking flowers dominate this plant. This ridiculously happy looking plant is another good filler for low cover – as long as it still gets the sun. H 20-30cm

*Helianthus* sp, *Sunflower*. This iconic flower doesn't have to be a competition giant; the smaller branched plants provide late summer flowers to a border too. A sunflower will add height and lightness to more solid planting. H 150 – 200cm



*Hemerocallis* sp, *Day Lily*. Long, strappy leaves push forth tall stems on which the long trumpet buds and bright flowers sit. The deep, rich flowers range from white to orange to pink and red and everything in between. H 40-100cm

*Osteospermum* sp, *Cape Daisy*. Often used as an annual, the Osteo works best when left to grow big. The big star shaped daisies will tumble and softened edges providing more low colour for borders and pots. H 40cm



Other plants for late summer colour:

Plants for Shade/Part Shade

*Anemone x hybrida*, *Japanese Anemone* - a classic

*Calamagrostis x acutiflora* – One of the few grasses to handle partial shade

*Cimicifuga simplex* – A tall, striking umbellifer in purple or green

*Astilbe* sp – Big plumes form white to red make this a bright plant for light shade

*Thalictrum delavayi* – Beautiful, delicate, purple puffs of cotton on a tall stem

*Tricyrtis* sp – Stunning, Orchid like flowers in purple, white or yellow

Beautiful, Late Flowering Plants That Don't Quite Fit In My Scheme, But Might Fit In Yours!

*Agapanthus* sp – A favorite and rightly so.

*Cosmos atrosanguineus*, - Deep purple, chocolate flavour flowers!

*Erigeron karvinskianus* – A little daisy that will get in everywhere.

*Geranium* sp – So many to choose from, my favorite is *G. cinereum*.

*Gladiolus* cultivars – Tall, soft flower spikes, often seen on chocolate boxes.

*Schizostylis coccinea* – Clear colours on a beautiful flower.

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