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### Color for the Water-Wise Garden

As more gardeners become concerned with overuse of water in ornamental landscapes they are searching for plants that thrive with moderate irrigation but will fill their gardens with a bounty of colorful blooms throughout the season.

These gardeners will find a rich assortment of perennials that not only add splashes of vibrant color but also attract butterflies and hummingbirds.

***Achillea spp.***, commonly known as yarrow, are “among the most carefree and generously blooming perennials for summer and early fall” according to Sunset’s Western Garden Book.

Yarrow begins blooming as early as May and can continue through August. They need only routine care: little to moderate water and cutting back after bloom to prolong the bloom period. Plant them in a lean, well-drained soil.

Deer and rabbits typically leave yarrow alone but butterflies favor them.

There are numerous varieties of yarrow available:

Varieties of *A. filipendula* (Fernleaf Yarrow) are tall plants with deep green, finely-divided, fern-like foliage. The blooms are excellent as freshly cut or dried flowers.

‘Cloth of Gold’ bears flat-topped golden yellow blooms on erect 3’ stems.

‘Coronation Gold’ also bears large, flat-topped golden yellow blooms on 3’ stems.

Either of these golden-flowered varieties blends well with the soft blues of *Nepeta* (Catmint) or the spiky purple blooms of *Salvia* or *Veronica*.

Varieties of *A. millefolium* (Common Yarrow) have gray-green foliage and will spread by underground runners.

‘Moonshine’ is one of the most popular Yarrows with canary-yellow blooms on erect 2’ stems.

'Paprika' bears apple-red blooms on 2' stems.

'Red Velvet' shows off with deep red blooms on a compact 18" plant.

***Gaillardia spp.***, commonly known as Blanket Flower, is becoming quite popular in water-wise gardens and for good reason - their showy daisy-like flowers of saturated yellow and orange add bold color to the summer landscape. Their blooms are usually covered with butterflies while deer tend to stay away from them.

Blanketflowers are best planted in mass or combined with blue or yellow-flowering plants. They also blend well with silver-leaved plants.

Provide blanketflowers with well-drained, lean soil. They will bloom from early to late summer if spent blooms are removed. If allowed to go to seed, they re-seed themselves freely.

There are numerous cultivars of our native species that are easily found at nurseries.

'Arizona Sun' and 'Goblin' are compact growers at just 9 – 12" tall with red and yellow daisy-like flowers. 'Arizona Sun' is an exceptionally prolific bloomer with large flowers.

'Burgundy' is a taller variety with large, wine-red blooms held on 3' stems. Too much water and fertilizer will make this plant leggy.

'Fanfare' is a newer variety with unique trumpet-shaped ray flowers of red and yellow.

'Oranges and Lemons' is another new variety which offers softer color tones of peachy-orange and yellow.

***Penstemon spp.*** grow naturally across North America although they are concentrated from the Great Plains westward. They can be found growing in cool spots at upper elevations or in hot, dry deserts. The stems bear tubular flowers that excel in attracting both butterflies and hummingbirds. Another plus – they are not favored by deer or rabbits.

When planting *Penstemon* be sure to provide good drainage and do not amend your soil as they prefer a lean soil. Combine them with other low-water use plants that bloom later in the season after the *Penstemon* blooms have faded such blue flax (*Linum lewisii*), yarrow (*Achillea spp.*), catmint (*Nepeta spp.*) or red yucca (*Hesperaloe parviflora*).

Here are a few colorful species we recommend for water-wise landscapes:

*Penstemon eatonii*, Firecracker Penstemon, has long, narrow scarlet flowers held on 2' high stems. Native to Arizona.

*Penstemon parryi*, Parry's Penstemon, blooms with reddish-pink flowers on 3' tall stems. Native to Arizona.

*Penstemon superbus*, Coral Penstemon, blooms with deep rose to red flowers on 3' tall stems. Native to Arizona.

***Sedum spp.***, commonly called Stonecrop, is an extensive group of succulent plants ranging from tiny groundcovers to large, upright plants.

Stonecrops offer the gardener easy care, butterfly-attracting blooms that dress-up the fall garden, and a general neat appearance. Keep the large seed heads standing over winter to feed hungry birds. Rabbits will typically leave your Stonecrops alone.

Stonecrops will grow best in average to poor soil as rich soil will make them lanky. They prefer full sun to light shade.

For an eye-catching late summer garden, mix Stonecrops with Russian Sage (*Perovskia*), Coneflower (*Echinacea*) or Blue Mist Shrub (*Caryopteris*).

Here is just a sampling of *Sedum* varieties:

*Groundcovers:*

'Dragon's Blood' has green foliage that turns bright red in fall and rosy-red blooms that appear in late summer on a 4" high plant.

'Bronze Carpet' has rose-red foliage topped with pink blooms on a 6" high plant.

'Angelina' sports needle-like golden-yellow foliage topped with yellow flowers. It grows to 6" high and is a vigorous spreader.

*Uprights:*

'Autumn Joy' is a long-time gardener's favorite. Large, bluish-green, succulent leaves are attractive all summer. In late summer this 2' tall plant is topped with clusters of pink blooms that mature to coppery pink then rust.

'Frosty Morn' brightens the garden with light green, fleshy leaves edged in white. White to pale pink blossoms appear in late summer on this 2 – 3' plant.

'Brilliant' offers rose-red flowers to contrast with blue-green succulent foliage on a 2' plant.

**Other notable perennials for color:**

*Berlandiera lyrata*, Chocolate Flower is a Southwest native that sports daisy-like yellow flowers with dark maroon centers that bloom profusely on a low, spreading plant. The flowers emit a chocolate-like fragrance.

*Hymenoxys acaulis*, Angelita Daisy is a Southwest native with bright yellow, daisy-like flowers on 6" stems held above grasslike, gray-green foliage. Angelita Daisy blooms consistently until heavy frost. The foliage maintains a neat clump all season.

*Psilostrophe tagetina*, Paper Flower is a Southwest native covered in small, lemony-yellow flowers all summer. A great plant for sprawling over rocks.

It's easy to fall for the myth that a water-wise garden can't be colorful but as you can see there are numerous water-wise perennials bursting with color.