Gardens that Give and Give: Top Twelve Essential Perennials

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Why Perennials?

Deeper roots = More self-maintaining over time through mutual plant, bacteria, fungal relationships

Perennial ecosystems imitate nature in form and function while providing for food in your backyard, farm or ranch.

Animal Habitat! Pollinator habitat.

Create Microclimates by not disrupting soil.

Moderates Pests!

Sequesters carbon

Edible Roots, Shoots, Leaves, Flowers, Fruits - Plant once - Sustained yields over many years, 4 season eating

Builds soil
Design Considerations for Perennial Foodscapes

Observe and Interact - Right Plant, Right Place
Build habitat to moderate pest and disease
Scatter patterning, like nature, polycultures
Taste a Sample/Know the peskiness
Spacing - use mature size dimensions
Cycle of Life - Feed living and dying
Plan for succession/layer
Provide good drainage
Plant for full season foraging
Mulch in winter
Daylily - *Hemerocallis fulva*

**Edible shoots** - 8” tall, fresh.

**Flower buds** - Harvest while still green and firm, these can be steamed, boiled, or stir-fried. They also make great pickles.

**Tubers** - Late autumn - early spring. Don’t peel tubers: Scrub and cook as you would potatoes, remembering that they won't take quite as long to cook.

Correct ID necessary: orange flowers, leaves yellow green, leaves applaud, tubers

Useful understory plant, low maintenance, erosion control, ornamental, wild growing conditions, ground cover.
Sochan - Green Headed Coneflower

Related to Echinacea
Roots immune stimulant
Leaves - food
Ally to skin and kidneys, menstrual cramps, emmenagogue
Native, abundant wild green, riparian, floodplain, trails, roadways, part shade.
Nettles - *Urtica dioica*

Spring and Fall harvest
Mulch, foliar feed and insecticide. Pollinator habitat
Protein, Vit A and C, iron, magnesium, calcium, potassium and fiber, chlorine, chlorophyll
Rich soil, disturbed habitats, moist woodlands, thickets, along rivers, and along partially shaded trails.
Pick in quantity, steam them, freeze them, put them in soups, stews, and other dishes, dry them, tincture in alcohol.
Diuretic, bronchial, urinary, bites and stings, allergies, drying and cooling. Superfood. Tea or food herb.
Asparagus officinalis

Garden fresh delicacy!
Yields 10-15 years
Male hybrids, females can be weedy
Ferns and hard red berries
Hardy to Zone 3
Well drained soil, rich, manure, pH 7
Asparagus beetle, aphid, row cover- Choose disease resistant varieties (Mary Washington, Jersey Supreme)
Crowns - allow 4-5 weeks for gemination, 6-8” deep, 2 “ below soil. Add soil, don’t bury tips. Harvest little 2nd year, more 3rd.
Rhubarb - *Rheum x cultorum*

Pies, sauces, tart, celery like vegetable
Flower buds, stalks edible - when cooked
Caution fresh
Roots and leaves toxic, TCM
3-5’ wide. Productive
Moist, well drained soil.
Full sun, heavy feeder,
Mulch in winter
Few pests and diseases
Monarda - *M. fistulosa & M. didyma*

**Eastern Beebalm, Bergamot, Wild Oswego Tea, Horsemint**

Antiseptic, carminative, diaphoretic, diuretic and stimulant
Colds, catarrh, headaches, and gastric disorders, to reduce
low fevers and soothe sore throat, to relieve flatulence,
nausea, menstrual pain, and insomnia.

Above ground parts, pot herb, June to July harvest
Flowers - garnish, pollinators!
Leaves - sauteed, spicy enhancement, aromatic
and medicinal tea
Edible fresh or sauteed
Part shade, dry thickets, clearings and woodland edges
Strawberry - *Fragaria*

First fruits to mature and easy to grow. Compact, solo planting or interspersed. Fruits for years.

June-bearing varieties - 2 to 3 weeks in early summer. Day neutral varieties produce main crop in early summer, then smaller crops all summer long. Alpine strawberry plants are smaller and produce tiny, intensely flavored fruits all summer. Everbearing steadily produce small yields throughout summer.

Strawberries grow best on sandy loam soil in full sun. Remove runners for more crowns.

The mulch preserves soil moisture, prevents weed growth, and keeps the berries from touching the ground and rotting.
French Sorrel - Rheum *acetosa*

Vegetable in Europe
Zesty, lemon tang and delicate texture
Edible year round, first and last greens in garden
Cut back flower stalks
Mulch plants- high in calcium, magnesium and potassium
‘Profusion’
Oxalic Acid
Milkweed - *Asclepias syriaca*

**Shoots** come first, tasty green beans! Next come **florets**, unopened flower buds that suggest broccoli but taste like okra. The fully opened **flowers**, laden nectar, make a superb syrup (think cocktails and sorbet!). Or dried for winter use. Finally, the small, **young pods** are another great vegetable.

Sprouts, buds, immature pods eaten by Iroquois and prairie tribes. The Chippewas stewed the flowers.
Milkweed ID! Ensure it’s not dogbane or butterfly weed!

**Leaves Opposite:** Leaves grow in opposite pairs along the stalk. Generally are 4-9 inches (10-23 cm) long and 2-4 inches (5-10 cm) wide. Oblong or ovate in shape with smooth margins. Thick, meaty leaves — not succulent.

**Velvet “fuzz”:** The entire plant is covered in a light pubescence giving it a soft, velvety feel (dogbane on the other hand lacks this throughout the plant).

**Exudes Latex when Broken:** If you break the leaves, petioles, or stalk it will exude a large amount of white, milky latex.

**Flavor is Slightly Sweet:** If a small tongue-taste reveals that the plant is bitter, it is not Common Milkweed!
Milkweed -

Careful with sap.
Eat a little, wait 30 min.
No bitterness!

Young shoots, leaves and pods boiled in 3+ changes of water. Collect flower buds and flowers during summer. Dip buds in boiling water for one minute, batter and deep fry. When cooked like broccoli, buds are similar to okra. The flower clusters may also be battered and fried. After cooking, buds, flowers and leaves can be frozen. Use like okra in soups. A bit of baking soda in the water will help break down the tough fibers in the seed pod. Lacto-Ferment.

Upland prairies, fields, meadows, waste places, prefers full sun
Jerusalem Artichoke - *Helianthus tuberosus*

Sunchokes, 6- 12’ tall. Full sun/light shade
Tubers crisp and sweet - medium sized
Raw, cooked, baked
Use with potatoes, roots
Inulin (In asparagus, chicory root, yacon - prebiotic, increasing body’s absorption of calcium)
Form large colonies, poor companion plant
‘Dwarf sunray’ - grows to 6’
Thin to keep vigorous
Dandelion - *Taraxacum officinale*

Bitter, cooling properties, diuretic & laxative, stimulates liver & bile production
Aids digestion, urinary & skin.
Pioneer species, dynamic accumulator, early pollen source, hardy, self sowing, disturbed areas.
Flowers, Root, Leaves edible and medicinal
Hardy Kale - *Brassica oleracea acephala*

Kale leaves sweetest in the fall, touched by a light frost. Kale will produce new leaves all winter in zones 7 to 10. Cold protection extends season: thick mulch, row cover, or plastic tunnels.

Sources of Calcium, Vitamin K, the B vitamin folic acid, and beta carotene, which is converted to vitamin A in the liver. D

July - sow seeds in flats for late July transplanting to field or garden

Napus types were faster-growing and more robust than the Scotch Curled types, which grew more slowly and deliberately.

‘White Russian’ only sustained moderate damage; the ‘Winterbor’ and especially the ‘Vates’ held their own.

‘Western Front’ or ‘Red Russian’ - mild, creamy, and nutty.
Thank you!

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