

Spring Blooms!

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"Each spring a gardening instinct, sure as the sap rising in the trees, stirs within us. We look about and decide to tame another little bit of ground."
Lewis Gantt

No flower is quite so welcome as the first one to open in spring. And fortunately for gardeners in the midwest, some of them are tough enough to bloom even through a snow drift. Spring bulbs like snowdrops, squill and crocus are some of the earliest flowers to open, with daffodils, hyacinths and tulips soon to follow.

There are some wonderful perennials for blossom and color early in the spring also. Though it will vary according to microclimate, the perennials below begin to bloom in March or April and are listed generally in order of "appearance." The first three are in order in the photo opposite.

Lenten rose, *Hellebore*. Large, cup-shaped, rose-like flowers open in March and bloom for 8-10 weeks. Colors range from pale green to white, pink and purple. Prefers rich, organic, well-drained soils in part to full shade and protection from cold winter winds. Clumps establish fairly quickly. Foliage is wide, glossy and semi-evergreen.

Pasque flower, *Pulsatilla*. Beautiful bell-shaped flowers—in shades of blue, violet, yellow and white—open in March or April and develop plume-like seedheads. Foliage is silvery and covered with hair. Native to prairies, it requires good drainage.

Brunnera, *Brunnera*. This beautiful perennial is grown mainly for its attractive heart-shaped foliage, but it also has highly attractive forget-me-not like blue flowers in March or April. The cultivar 'Jack Frost' has beautiful silver leaves with green veins.

Lungwort, *Pulmonaria*. Though lungwort is more known for its silvery, white-mottled foliage, the attractive spring flowers tend to be a mix of pale pink and blue at the same time. It prefers rich, cool, moist sites and afternoon shade. Grows 8" tall and 12" wide.

Candytuft, *Iberis sempervirens*. In April, masses of white flowers attract butterflies. Growing to just 10" tall, it's a great addition to a rock garden or border edging. The bright green foliage is semi-evergreen.

Bleeding Heart, *Dicentra*. Flower displays begin in April and last up to six weeks or more. Flowers are usually pink, red or white and attract hummingbirds. Fine cut foliage accents the dangling heart-shaped flowers carried on long arching stems. Grows 10-30" in full or part shade.

Columbine, *Aquilegia*. A great spring-blooming perennial for full sun to part shade that will naturalize in optimum conditions. Foliage is delicate and April/May flowers have distinctive spurs.

Bluebells, *Mertensia*. Pink flower buds open to clusters of pendulous blue flowers. Foliage dies back by mid-summer so they are best massed and left undisturbed in shady woodland areas, possibly interplanted with ferns or hostas to cover fading foliage.

Blue star, *Amsonia*. Powdery blue flowers open in April-May on feathery green foliage that will turn golden yellow in fall. Cutting back the foliage after flowering will result in a tighter foliage mound. Prefers part shade.

Shrubs and trees also offer an amazing variety of spring bloom, starting with witchhazel in February and continuing on: flowering dogwood, forsythia, cherry, plum, magnolia, chokeberry, serviceberry, viburnum, redbud, buckeye, weigela and sweet shrub.

Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, plantnebraska.org

