

Great Expectations—Just How Perennial is that Perennial?

While the word perennial is defined as “lasting or existing for a long or apparently infinite time,” a perennial plant is defined much more modestly as “a plant that lives more than two years.”

Thankfully there are many that survive for a decade or more and make a gardener’s life much easier. Beds don’t have to be replanted, much of the structure of the garden remains upright and visible throughout the year and plants don’t have to be purchased annually.

Long-lived Perennials

Below are some of the longest-lived of the perennials. This varies greatly by how favorable the site is, how much care they receive and how much competition they have from other plants. (Note: For plants with dissimilar or lesser-known scientific names, the scientific name follows the common one in the lists below.)

Aster, *Symphyotrichon*

Astilbe

Balloon flower, *Platycodon*

Bee balm, *Monarda*

Blazing star, *Liatris*

Bleeding heart, *Dicentra*

Butterfly milkweed, *Asclepias tuberosa*

Campanula

Catmint, *Nepeta*

Coneflower, *Echinacea*

Daylily, *Hemerocallis*

Evening primrose, *Oenothera*

False indigo, *Baptisia*

Geranium

Hosta

Iris

Joe-pye weed, *Eupatorium*

Lenten rose, *Helleborus*

Peony (under the right conditions some peonies have survived 70-100 years)

Rudbeckia

Sedum

Yarrow, *Achillea*



Short-lived Perennials

Just as gardeners happily plant annuals every year and are thankful for a summer of bright colors and extended bloom, there are many short-lived perennials we plant knowing they may only survive for a few years. And some of them pay it forward to future years by reseeding themselves into the future. Still, we plant them happily and hope they will continue on by reseeding themselves.

Blanket flower, *Gaillardia*

Blue-eyed grass, *Sisyrinchium*

Columbine, *Aquilegia*

Delphinium

Flax, *Linum*

Lobelia silphitica

Pinks, *Dianthus*

Penstemon

Pincushion flower, *Scabiosa*

Shasta daisy, *Leucanthemum*

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PHOTO: Peonies have been known to live 100 years.