STRETCHING LATE SUMMER GARDEN COLOR

Most gardens and landscapes can be appreciated in every season offering lush spring growth, summer and fall color, and winter form. However, the transitional days of late summer can dullen even the best designed landscapes. Summer bloom is waning, yet it’s still too early for fall interest. Even strong foliage that has provided earlier interest takes on a dryer faded pallor.

The most obvious option is to incorporate late summer blooming perennials. Iron Butterfly ironweed (*Vernonia lettermannii* ‘Iron Butterfly’) can deliver a deep purple spray of color on a plant more compact and finer textured than the native species. Golden Fleece goldenrod (*Solidago phacelata* ‘Golden Fleece’) also delivers a late summer punch with arching sprays of bright yellow flowers in August and September. Both of these species offer the bonus of attracting pollinators. Golden aster (*Heterotheca villosa*), another member of the aster family blooms in late summer on taller stems. If pinker tones are your liking, Rosy Returns daylilies (*Hemerocallis* ‘Rosy Returns’) will stretch the bloom season from midsummer through September. Like clockwork the floral scapes of magic lilies (*Lycoris squamigera*) in Fernwood’s Hosta Bowl pop up the first days of every August.

Coaxing earlier bloomers to rebloom is also an approach to extending garden color into late summer. Hardy Salivas such as May Night (*Salvia x sylvestris* ‘Mainacht’) can re-bloom if cut back to the basal foliage after blooming in May and June. Delphiniums, butterfly weed (*Aesclepias tuberosa*), and numerous other early bloomers respond in the same manner.

Short grasses can liven up the late summer color with foliage color and textural interest. Autumn moor grass (*Seslaria autumnalis*) brightens up Fernwood’s Wanda Franklin Entry Garden in drifts of yellow green low meadow foliage from late summer to fall complimenting the intermixed deeper tones of adjacent companion plants. Little bluestem begins to start turning from grey-blue to pink at the same time.

Shrubs should also not be forgotten in the late summer border. Oakleaf hydrangeas (*Hydrangea quercifolia*) and panicle hydrangeas such as Pink Diamond (*Hydrangea paniculata* ‘Pink Diamond) are just a few hydrangeas that can add impact to the late summer landscape. A lesser used small woody shrub, Leptodermis (*Leptodermis oblonga*) continues to produce lavender pink blooms throughout the summer well into fall on compact stems. A bigger show stopper is bush clover (*Lespedeza thunbergii* ‘Gibralter*) with solid deep pink strands of bloom on 8 foot stems arching to the ground.

So with a little thought towards some of these lesser used saviors of summer, you can stretch your garden color and bridge the August color gap and segue into a beautiful fall.