

# TOM'S GARDEN

## BLOG

JUNE 2022

### Perennial Doesn't Mean Forever

Perennial means that a plant takes more than 1 year to complete the life cycle. It is also a plant that lives for more than one year but may die back in the winter and re-emerge the following spring from its crown or root system.

Some short-lived perennials only live 3 to 5 years and then die back or decline. A lot of plants will reseed and spread rapidly, making you think they are perennial. Lemon balm and catnip come to mind in this category.

Some plants sold as perennials are actually bi-ennials, meaning they grow foliage the first year, flower and create seeds the second year. (Canterbury bells, foxglove, black-eyed Susan, hollyhock.)

Some plants will die out in the center and need to be dug up periodically, divided, and replanted. This will also give you extra plants that you can move to another area or give them to friends and neighbors.

Most perennials, except for bog plants, require well-drained soil over the winter months, so a raised bed is ideal.

### Slugs and Snails

Slugs and snails are close relatives of clams, mussels, and other mollusks. The body is soft and moves by means of a broad, muscular sole that covers the underside. On slugs, a large lobe called the mantle is present on the front half the back; this is covered by a hard shell in snails.

Two pairs of tentacles are present in the front, a short pair for sensing odors and a longer pair tipped with eyes.



Slugs and snails feed at night or during very cloudy days, avoiding sunny, drying conditions. During the day most slugs and snails go to sheltered areas, such as under debris, in soil cracks, or shaded areas of dense vegetation.



Slug damage on Hosta leaf

### Prevention

Garden slug control can be difficult because the damage is blamed on other pests. Since slugs feed at night, gardeners notice the damage but can't find what is causing it when searching during the day. The cause becomes a mystery, and an insecticide is sprayed on the plant in an attempt to kill

the bug, which is useless against a mollusk like a snail or slug.

Slug damage looks like;

Perfect round holes in tomatoes, strawberries, and other soft fruit.

Nothing remains of seedlings but ribs and stems.

Ragged holes in leaf edges and centers.

Slime trails on plants, rocks, or mulch.

The most obvious solution is to hand pick

The (slimy) slugs at night armed with a flashlight and a pail of soapy water.

Another alternative is a slug and snail killer.

This product is non-toxic and can be used in areas where pet and wildlife protection are a concern. When slugs and snails ingest the

bait, they stop feeding and crawl back to their shelter and eventually die. It remains

effective under varying weather and environmental conditions. This product

gives protection to gardens, greenhouses, outdoor ornamentals, vegetables, fruits, and berries. The bait is scattered on the soil

around any plants and can be used up to the day of harvest. As always, read and

follow directions on the label of any insecticide. I have used this product with

great success. Active ingredient: Sodium Ferric EDTA.

### **Black Swallowtail Butterfly**

The black swallowtail butterfly is a regular visitor to our vegetable and herb gardens.

Adults feed on flowers for the nectar.

Caterpillars feed on host plants.

The host plants most popular are dill, bronze and green fennel, parsley, carrot fronds, Queen Anne's lace, and any umbrella-shaped flower.



Adult Black Swallowtail

The caterpillar will vary from striped, green to brown and will often match the color of the plant it is feeding on.



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If you plant the above listed plants, they will come!

“Where flowers degenerate man cannot live.” *Napoleon Bonaparte*

## Container Growing

When growing vegetables or fruits in a container you can use almost anything that will contain the soil and has drainage holes.

\*Hanging baskets work well for dwarf tomatoes and strawberries.

\*A 10-inch pot is good for lettuce and arugula.

\*Use a 5-gallon size for tomatoes, peppers, and squeeze in a few herbs.

\*A 55-gallon plastic barrel, cut in half, will make two large planters.

Remember that dwarf or bush-type plants are best for containers.

Some plants that grow well in containers:

\*Lettuce, spinach, beans, and beets need 6 inches of soil.

\*Carrots, peas, and peppers need 8 inches.

\*Eggplant, squash, and cucumbers need 10 inches.

\*Tomatoes need 12 inches.

\*Herbs grow very well in containers.

### The soil

Sure, you could buy bags of this and bags of that and make your own soil recipe, but with so many choices for commercial potting soil, why bother?

These mixes are sterilized, well-draining and convenient. Please don't use dirt from your garden. It is heavy, could contain weed seeds and undesirable insects.

Just fill your container to about 1 inch below the rim and plant your plant. This leaves room for watering.

When creating a patio pot for flowers, remember the "thriller, filler, spiller" technique.

## Pincushion Flower

Pincushion Flower (*Scabiosa caucasica*) is aptly named. Hold a flower, there are many species, at eye level and look across the top of it and you will notice the "pins" sitting in the middle of the flower. The pins are the stamens of the flower.

The other, more historic name for plants of this species is scabious. Its leaves were thought to relieve the itch of scabies and other afflictions of the skin, even sores caused by the Bubonic Plague.

This is an excellent perennial for gardeners almost anywhere. The usual color is purple, but some whites and pinks can be found. Some varieties make an excellent dried specimen.

Plants grow to 30 inches and should be placed in full sun.

They bloom in late spring to early summer and make good cut flowers for arrangements. They also attract lots of bees and butterflies. Plants are hardy to USDA zone 5.



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