

Tender Perennials: More Than Just Expensive Annuals®

John Valleau

Valleybrook Gardens (Ont) Ltd., 961 Line 4 Road, R.R. #6, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, L0S 1J0 Canada

Email: jv@valleybrook.com

Good afternoon everyone. I'd like to thank I.P.P.S. for inviting me here today to share but a glimpse of the very interesting and diverse world of tender perennials.

The term "Tender Perennial" is basically an attempt by the grower and retailer to draw awareness to a unique and distinctive group of plants that might otherwise be overlooked. These plants do not necessarily have a whole lot in common with each other, botanically speaking.

What the term really means is that a certain plant is hardy somewhere warmer than where you live. Using this assumption, it's easy to then understand this term is a catchall group that might include herbaceous and evergreen perennials, semi-tropical and tropical woody plants, bulbs, palms, ferns, grasses, succulents, and even water plants.

Retailers often have a difficult time marketing tender perennials, since the plants don't always fit nicely into the various departments such as annuals, perennials, trees and shrubs, or even tropical houseplants. Often tender perennials have longer and more expensive production schedules and must command a higher price than traditional seed-grown bedding-out plants such as marigolds or salvia. Attempts have been made to coin such words as "temperennials" but, frankly, it has not worked particularly well. From a grower's perspective, it can be difficult reaching the right buyer at a retail garden centre if, for instance, you are a perennial grower that adds a few tender perennials to your offerings — your wonderful list of treasures may not ever reach the annual buyer at the stores.

Despite the retailing difficulties, as interest in container gardening particularly has exploded in the past 5 years or so, home gardeners have become much more interested in the exotic. They know there is more to life than plain old petunias! One advantage appears to be that plants destined for containers seem to have better perceived value than those traditional annuals used for bedding out. The popularity of container gardening has allowed growers to produce tender perennials with longwinded production times, when compared to the fast seed-grown traditional bedding crops. Holding over stock plants in protected greenhouses for the winter, ordering more expensive plugs, cuttings, tissue culture starters, roots, or bulbs becomes feasible when the higher end price is achievable. All kinds of growers are now dabbling in tender perennials, not just the annual growers with cozy warm greenhouses through the winter, but even perennial growers and those doing outdoor production.

So, let's take a look at both some familiar and not-so-familiar tender perennials!

Table 1. Tender perennials plant list.

<i>Abutilon</i> (flowering maple)	<i>Hibiscus acetosella</i> (red shield hibiscus)
<i>Agapanthus</i> (lily-of-the-Nile)	<i>Impatiens</i>
<i>Alternanthera dentata</i> 'Purple Knight'	<i>Ipomoea batatas</i> 'Blackie' and 'Margarita' (sweet potato vine)
<i>Angelonia</i>	<i>Lantana</i>
<i>Argyranthemum</i> (Marguerite daisy)	<i>Lavandula stoechas</i> 'Otto Quast' (butterfly lavender)
<i>Arundo donax</i> var. <i>versicolor</i> (variegated giant reed)	<i>Musa</i> (banana)
<i>Begonia</i>	<i>Nicotiana sylvestris</i> (giant tobacco)
<i>Begonia rex</i>	<i>Ophiopogon planiscapus</i> 'Nigrescens' (black mondo grass)
<i>Brachyscome</i> (Swan River daisy)	<i>Osteospermum</i> (Cape daisy, African daisy)
<i>Brugmansia</i> (angel's trumpet)	<i>Pelargonium</i> 'Vancouver Centennial'
<i>Calibrachoa</i>	<i>Pennisetum setaceum</i> (fountain grass)
<i>Canna</i> 'Phasion' (canna lily)	<i>Pennisetum setaceum</i> 'Rubrum' (purple fountain grass)
<i>Carex buchananii</i> (leatherleaf sedge)	<i>Penstemon</i> 'Andenken an Friedrich Hahn' (syn. 'Garnet') (beard tongue)
<i>Carex oshimensis</i> 'Evergold'	<i>Perilla frutescens</i> Magilla™ shiso
<i>Cerintho major</i> (honeywort)	<i>Persicaria microcephala</i> 'Red Dragon' (fleece flower)
<i>Chlorophytum</i> (spider plant)	<i>Phormium</i> (New Zealand flax)
<i>Colocasia esculenta</i> 'Black Magic' (elephant ears)	<i>Phygelius</i> (Cape fuchsia)
<i>Coreopsis</i> 'Limerock Ruby' and <i>C. rosea</i> 'Sweet Dreams'	<i>Plectranthus argentatus</i>
<i>Cosmos atrosanguineus</i> (chocolate cosmos)	<i>Rudbeckia hirta</i> 'Cherokee Sunset', 'Prairie Sun' (gloriosa daisy)
<i>Crocsmia</i>	<i>Salvia greggii</i> (Texas sage)
<i>Cuphea</i> (cigar plant)	<i>Salvia leucantha</i> (Mexican bush sage)
<i>Cynara cardunculus</i> (cardoon)	<i>Scaevola</i> (fan flower)
<i>Dahlia</i>	<i>Solenostemon</i> 'Sedona' (coleus)
<i>Delosperma cooperi</i> (ice plant)	<i>Stipa tenuissima</i> (Mexican feather grass)
<i>Diascia</i> (twinspur)	<i>Strobilanthes dyeriana</i> (Persian shield)
<i>Duranta</i> (golden dewdrop)	<i>Tradescantia</i> (wandering Jew)
<i>Echeveria</i> and other succulents, such as <i>Aeonium</i> , <i>Agave</i>	<i>Tradescantia pallida</i> (purple heart vine)
<i>Eucomis comosa</i> (pineapple lily)	<i>Verbena bonariensis</i> (Brazilian verbena)
<i>Euphorbia cotinifolia</i> (Caribbean copper plant)	<i>Verbena</i> 'Homestead Purple'
<i>Gaura lindheimeri</i> (butterfly gaura)	
<i>Hedera helix</i> 'Glacier'	
<i>Helichrysum petiolare</i> 'Limelight' (licorice vine)	
<i>Heliotropium</i>	