

It's Time to Plant Fall Flowers

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Leonotis

Barleria

Salvia leucantha

Fall is a refreshing time of year for the gardener. The weather is cooling a little. A whole new array of flowers come into their own as the temperatures drop. Fall also is a time for planting. What we do now can determine, to a great degree, how colorful our spring will be.

Gardeners have to plan and plant ahead. If, for example, we wish to have colorful flowers this winter or early next spring, fall is the time to plant. Now we can plant snapdragons, petunias, and dianthus. A little later, as the temperatures cool more, we can add pansies and flowering cabbage and kale. In November, we seed bachelor buttons, poppies, sweet peas, and larkspur.

Starting now and continuing for the next couple of months, many fall-blooming perennials will be coming into flower. Now, in late summer or early fall is also a good time to plant some of these perennials.

Lion's ear, *Leonotis leonurus*, a striking orange-flowered perennial, goes by the common name of lion's ear or lion's mane. It grows to four to five feet tall, with an almost equal spread. Lion's ear flowers only in the fall. But then it flowers with a profusion of the bright orange flowers.

Cigar flower, *Cuphea micropetala*, has orange flowers shaped like tiny cigars, tipped with yellow. The shrubby plant grows to four to five feet tall with a similar spread. It's tough as nails and very drought tolerant.

Phillipine violet (*Barleria cristata*) reaches a height of three to four feet tall, with a two to three foot spread. In fall the plant is covered with dark lavender flowers. As the flowers fall from the plant, the ground beneath the plant becomes blanketed with color also.

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Firespike (*Odontonema strictum*) is an old favorite with many gardeners. Reaching a height of four to five feet, the plant is topped with tubular red flowers now and on through fall. Hummingbirds and some butterflies are drawn to the flowers. Firespike prefers partial shade or filtered sunlight.

Perennial Salvias: There are a number of salvias that bloom heaviest in the fall. Most are three to five feet tall and are attractive to hummingbirds.

- *Salvia leucantha* (Mexican sage): purple or purple and white flowers. One of the most popular.
- *Salvia regla*: orange-red flowers
- *Salvia elegans* (pineapple sage): bright red flowers
- *Salvia madrensis*: yellow flowers
- *Salvia miniata*: red flowers
- *Salvia guaranitica*: dark blue or violet flowers
- *Salvia greggii*: red, pink, or white flowers on one to two-foot tall plants
- *Salvia* x 'Indigo Spires': long spikes of blue-purple flowers

Swamp sunflower and willowleaf sunflower, (*Helianthus angustifolius* and *H. salicifolius*), are large plants with spectacularly brilliant yellow flowers.

Garden mums, especially the pink-flowering Korean mums, are also good fall-flowering perennials.

Ornamental grasses combine beautifully with fall-flowering perennials in the landscape. Many kinds of ornamental grasses are peaking at this time of year. Their flowers and seedheads, backlit by the autumn sunlight, make spectacular additions in the perennial bed or border. Muhly grass, a native, with its pinkish-purple flower heads, is popular with many gardeners.

For more information on gardening in our area, please visit our website at <http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu>.

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