Try These Five Stellar Flowering Perennials

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With spring in the air, I am beginning to clean up my perennial beds and in doing so I marvel at the stellar plants beginning to emerge in those beds. For me, the criteria of a “stellar” perennial is reliability, duration of bloom time, low level of care and value to wildlife, insects and butterflies. So I asked myself, which five plants would I choose, meeting those criteria for a stellar plant?

I would begin with soap aloe/Aloe saponaria; a robust clumping form of aloe. This plant stays up year around, producing one and a half to two foot flower stalks beginning in spring and on and off till the real cold sets in. The flower stalks bear creamy shrimp orange pendulous, tubular blooms that persist for weeks, much to the hummingbird’s delight. It is extremely care-free and drought and salt tolerant. This aloe grows well in full sun to light shade and is a great pass-along plant.

Bulbine/Bulbine frutescens also makes the list. It is a clumping plant with fleshy, grass-like foliage bearing stems of small yellow-orange blossoms that just cry out to butterflies and an array of pollinating insects. Bulbine reaches eight to ten inches in height and blooms pretty much non-stop from spring until frost. Provide it with full sun to light shade, well drained soil and this gem will perform effortlessly. Bulbine is salt tolerant.
Blue glory vine *Thunbergia battescombeii* is not really a true vine, since its arching stems only reach three to four feet. This perennial is one of the first to start blooming in my garden, bearing breathtaking deep blue-purple flaring tubular flowers with a yellow throat continuously till frost. Provide blue glory with full to part sun and it will perform effortlessly all season long.

Anise hyssop ‘Blue Fortune’ *Agastache foeniculum* is another carefree perennial that has an erect, narrow growth habit to three feet. Blue Fortune bears lavender-blue flowers all season long, and not only attracts butterflies and a host of pollinating insects but are also edible with a delicate anise flavor. Blue Fortune performs best in full sun to light shade.

Cigarette plant *Cuphea ignea* is a shrubby perennial growing to two feet or so that bears slender orange tipped-in-yellow, tubular blooms mid-summer and fall. This plant calls in hummingbirds and butterflies by the numbers, and late summer when the sulphur butterflies are numerous, this plant will literally be covered with them, an amazing sight to see. Easy to grow cigarette plant thrives in well drained soil and in full to part sun.

All of these plants should be readily available at your favorite locally-owned nurseries. So let spring fever begin!

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