

Late bloomers

By Linda Roe

Many of the fall blooming perennials are like gawky teenagers taking up space in summer flower gardens. Suddenly, around Labor Day, each bloom rises over the tired summer flowers like a phoenix.

One of my favorites is Rudbeckia herbstone, or "Autumn Sun." It is tall and slim, blooming over the top of my peonies in front of a finished clematis. Six feet tall, with pale yellow daisy flowers and a green cone center, it takes

up little ground space and can be grown behind shorter, earlier-blooming plants or in between shrubs. Everyone is familiar with the more commonly seen Blackeyed Susan, or Rudbeckia goldstrum. Shorter, with more golden petals and a dark brown center, this is a classic when combined with ornamental grass and upright sedums.

The perennial sunflowers will shine their way through a foggy fall day with cheerful yellow flowers. Helianthus "Lemon Queen" is a six-foot-tall clump of little lemon yellow flowers. "Lodden Gold" beams brighter, with bigger golden flowers and darker centers. When they are done blooming, leave the seed heads for the birds.

It is no coincidence that the homecoming queen always had a mum corsage, as chrysanthemums are the traditional queens of the fall garden. Unfortunately, the big corsage mums are not hardy outdoors. We can, however, grow their cousins, the hardy tall mums. They come in a variety of colors that will match any prom dress. To keep your mums from growing to gangly gawkiness, pinch them back in early summer.

Asters, too, have always had a date for the fall dance. They dress in shades of pink, purple, blue and white and are always fashionably late. The punk rockers of the aster class, boltonias, are tall and not very attractive, until they become covered with white or pale purple blooms in October.

Sedums, or "Stonecrops," are the old reliables. They look like little broccoli heads before they bloom, then remain attractive all season. They are gorgeous in the fall, attracting butterflies and bees, and will grow in any location except wet shade. Flower color varies from light pink to dark red, and some have a red stem and leaf that goes well with gray, drought-tolerant



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grasses. The little trailing sedums are excellent additions for a rockery filled with spring flowers.

What about plants that like to hang out in the shadows? Toadlilies, or trycirtis, are odd-looking little flowers that are white or pale purple, with little dark speckles on the petals. They grow to about two feet tall and have a somewhat "weeping" form. Plant these where they can be seen up close and admired. Kiringshoma, a plant with no common name, has big palmate leaves and waxy, bell-like little yellow flowers. This plant does not look its best in nursery pots and may be hard to find. It is worth the hunt, though. Easier to find and grow are Japanese anemones. They grow in sun or shade and are two to four feet tall with pink or white flowers that have single or double petals. They bloom for a long time.

Let's not forget the tall, blooming bulbs. Look for late blooming Oriental lilies and the old-fashioned and tough orange tiger. These will kick off the season in late August.

Colchicums are the classic fall bulbs, sometimes mislabeled as fall crocus. They have very showy purple flowers and are easy to grow in sun or part shade. The foliage comes up in spring, dies back to the ground, and then you wait for two months. When they bloom, they form a beautiful carpet of color. Put these where they won't be noticed in spring, but will be seen in fall.

Now is the time for late bloomers to shine, so invite one to your garden. ■

Information courtesy of Wight's Home & Garden, 5026 196th St. S.W., Lynnwood. Contact them at (425) 775-3636 or visit www.wights.com.