

# Start A Perennial Garden This Fall

## Ida's Notebook

Ida Risser



While I was writing of our trip to Alaska, many different things have been happening here on the farm.

We've had two floods in the last two weeks. The first one was second only to "Agnes." The torrent of muddy water covered our entire meadow, the sweet corn patch and even crept into the corner of the garden. We were left with piles of sand and gravel which we used to fill several sink holes. Also an assortment of logs, lumber and even a bowling ball and wheel covers were found.

The sink holes caused the men trouble as a wagon loaded with silage fell into one and had to be jacked up and pulled out. The silo filling operation has been plagued with troubles. One wagon had a broken sprocket and no parts were available for four days and so another wagon was leased.

One morning there was only a trickle of water for milking and washing the equipment. A plumber discovered a large hole had rusted through a pipe in the well.

A few weeks ago we were given three half-grown black cats and one grey kitten. These are the most playful bunch that I've ever seen. They romp and jump all day long. But, they've done a lot of their playing in the garden where I had my house plants and so many of them are broken off and flattened.

Now if I can get someone to repair my leaking washing machine, I'll be in business again. A recent load of six pair of overalls, when washed and examined, were found to all need patches. In fact, one pair with eleven patches was deemed ready for the rag bag. Mending overalls does take a lot of time.

## Vet From Netherlands

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are most common in Holland, there are also red and white and dual purpose animals.

Because of the continuing need to decrease the size of the herd, Lize said they have added about 20 beef animals. They have Blond Acquitain and Piemontese, French and Italian breeds popular in Holland. "They are expensive because they are now very popular. Now we have space in our barns for them." Nevertheless, Lize speculates that in a few years there will be a glut of beef cows and raising beef cattle will no longer be so

profitable.

Pennsylvania farms are different than those in the Netherlands. Upright silos are non-existent in home country, so the many silos which American farmers use surprised Lize. She noted that her home, and most others, is connected to the barn, sharing a common wall. Her present home and barn were constructed in 1968, though Lize said they previously lived on "a very old farm."

She noted that the government assisted farmers in consolidating pieces of land that they owned which were scattered in small par-

cells. This makes farming more economical. Their farm is about 35 hectares in size, and they raise some corn for silage, and also make haylage. Indeed, Lize says, "The only thing we have to buy is concentrate."

While she is here, Lize has been staying at the Bed and Breakfast accommodations of Kathy and Keith Vogt, Mount Joy, who have helped her experience Lancaster County experience outside of dairy farms. Lize exclaims, "The people are very friendly." She has found it to be expensive to visit here. Although she enjoys the food, she

YORK — Perennial gardens are taking new forms in modern landscapes. And fall is the perfect time to start one, if you're looking for a colorful addition to your yard says Penn State Extension horticulturist Dr. Larry Kuhns.

The traditional perennial border used to be a long narrow bed placed down one side of a yard against a fence or hedge. But today it's more likely to be a free-form island of any size or shape, located wherever a spot of color is needed. It may even be planted on a specially created mound to make it more interesting.

The first step in designing your perennial planting is to decide its shape and where to put it. The dimensions of your overall yard will, of course, affect this decision. You may wish to locate the plot near a patio, porch or picture window, where it can be most easily enjoyed.

The amount of time and effort you'll be able to devote to caring for the plot will have a lot to do with its size. It's a good idea to start small. Then let it grow as your ideas (and interest) develop.

Soil preparation is very important for perennial flowers, stresses Kuhns. These plants need a soil with good physical structure and good drainage. Most Pennsylvania soils will be improved by the addition of organic matter. Where drainage is a problem, use a

mound. The best way to determine your lime and fertilizer needs is to have the soil tested. But in the absence of a soil test, add 3 pounds of 5-10-5 and 3 to 5 pounds of lime for each 100 square feet.

In planting perennials, Kuhns says to make a good-sized hole to accommodate the root system of plants. But take care not to set plants too deep. None of these plants likes to have its crown buried. Keep new plantings well watered during the fall and mulch them over this winter with evergreen branches or a combination of branches and straw. With this kind of protection they should come through the cold without heaving as the ground freezes and thaws.

Most perennials have a limited period of bloom. So the key to an attractive long-season garden is to choose those that have good foliage even after flowering, or the kind that when cut back will bloom again. Everyone will have their own list of favorites, but here are some that work well in modern landscapes.

### Perennial Flower Choices

Baby's breath (*Gypsophila*) is one excellent selection. They produce a thick cover of white or pink flowers on tall, thin stems. Different-sized cultivars exist, but the 2 to 4 foot type makes an ideal background for shorter and brightly colored plants. Baby's breath creates a fine spray effect in the garden just as it does in bouquets. Most cultivars are hardy throughout much of Pennsylvania. Plant in a bright location. Good soil moisture is needed all growing season to maintain plant quality.

Another perennial with fine texture is Astilbe. Its feathery plumes of red, white or pink flowers add color to shaded areas, where it's often difficult to establish color. Astilbe's highly divided leaves emerge in spring with an appealing coppery tint, intensifying to green in summer and turning bronze-yellow in fall. Moist, organic soil

claims, "It is very fattening."

Lize is delighted with the opportunities she has had to learn more about the embryo transplant business while experiencing life in this country - now she is ready to return to Holland and begin her career as a veterinarian.

is the key to success with Astilbe. Although it prefers shade, it will perform well in sun as long as the area is mulched well and watered adequately during summer months.

One perennial group that adds a natural quality to the landscape are the ferns. They offer a wide variety of foliage shapes and textures.

Places with deep shade and constant moisture are good settings for maidenhair fern (*Adiantum pedatum*). Its scallop-shaped leaflets, as thin as tracing paper, are to wiry black stems. The shaded fronds respond to the slightest breeze to provide a soft movement in the landscape.

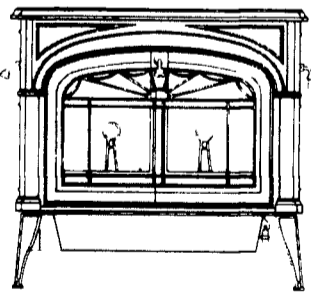
Ferns are overlooked as landscape plants because of the misconception that they are intolerant of sunlight. Many types grow very well in partial or even full sun. A good choice for sunny areas would be Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*). This fern adapts well to almost any situation; however, its overall shape depends somewhat on light intensity. Deep shade promotes an open arrangement of the fronds, while full sunlight encourages a more compact appearance. Unlike maidenhair fern, the Christmas fern is evergreen. It reaches heights 2 to 3 feet, and its fronds are shaped like long spears arching out from a central point.

In areas that are open, exposed and sun-drenched the sedums are very useful. Sedum "Autumn Joy" has several seasons of interest. Its individual pink flowers are quite small, but they form in large, dense clusters on top of stiff stems with succulent leaves. A hard frost transforms the original pink flowers and green foliage to golden yellow and rusty brown in winter. Few pests bother "Autumn Joy" or any other sedum, for that matter. This group has been quite successful in several sites with fairly stressful conditions.

The plantain lily or hosta (*Hosta*) is still a very effective perennial for many sites, especially shaded areas that lack color. Hosta is popular because of its variety of foliage variegation patterns and leaf shapes, and foliage puckering.

Hostas do produce flowers. Slender stems hold white to lilac blooms well above the center of the plant.

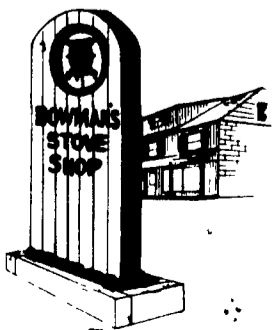
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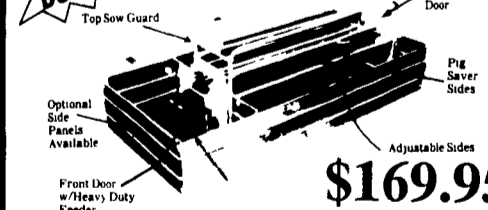
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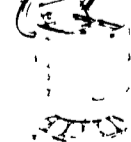
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