KPOV – *The Point*

Gardening: Get Good at It

“Low-Water Perennials for Central Oregon”

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As Central Oregon gardeners, we have the pleasant dilemma of choosing from hundreds of low-water or drought-tolerant perennials suited to our high desert climate. Besides being “water wise,” they also attract all kinds of pollinators to our gardens.

Oregon State University Extension Service horticulturist Gail Langellotto suggests a few tips to ensure success with low-water plants. First, segregate them from your high-water plants so you can manage their different moisture needs. Next, remember that even low-water plants need regular irrigation for the first two years while their roots get established. After that, a good soak every two weeks is sufficient. Before planting, consider installing a drip system or soaker hoses to direct water more efficiently. If you irrigate with a sprinkler, use a rain gauge to check periodically that you’re delivering the correct amount of water to the proper areas.

Finally, if possible, visit the demonstration garden at the Deschutes County Fair Grounds in Redmond to see examples of a variety of low-water plants that are all great options for Central Oregon.

The following ten plants – listed in alphabetical order – do well in Hardiness Zones 3-5. Most are deer resistant and all prefer full sun. To learn more about them and dozens more, download *Water-Wise Gardening in Central Oregon* from the Deschutes County OSU Extension Service website.

First up is **Catmint** (*Nepeta*) which is consistently rated as a top bee magnet. This free-blooming beauty cranks out lavender-blue flowers on upright stems from spring until fall.

If you’ve got the space and like a big, bold colors, try **Coneflowers** (*Echinacea*). Late-season daisy-like bloomers, they are a good cut or dried flower – and their dried seed heads are beloved by birds.

**Gayfeather** or **Blazing Star** (*Liatris* species) is a striking plant with pinkish-purple, spike-like blooms atop leafy, grass-like foliage. Several cultivars are available, all making a grand show from July through September.

There are over 20 species of **Agastache** or **Hummingbird mint**,some more cold hardy than others. Flowers – in an impressive array of colors - climb up tall spires that bloom from summer to the first frost.

If you have a sunny spot with good drainage and like hummingbirds, bees and the admiration of visitors, check out many of the zone-appropriate **Penstemon**hybrids.  They come in shades of purple, red, pink and orange.

**Orange Globe Mallow** (*Sphueralcea munroana*) is an attractive native with a handsome blend of gray-greenish leaves. Its showy blossoms – a unique shade of orange - shine May through July.

Many **Salvia** or **Sage** (*Salvia sylvestris* ) cultivars are also popular options. Their formal, spike-like flowers attract butterflies and bees and, if deadheaded, provide a second bloom. Just be sure to select cultivars such as ‘May Night’ and ‘Blue Hill’ that don’t reseed!

If you want a little drama, try **Sea holly** (*Eryngium amethystinum*). With its spiky, thistle-like, ice blue flowers, it pairs well with small ornamental grasses. It’s also an intriguing cut flower, fresh or dried.

**Sedum** (*Sedum* ‘Autumn Joy’) is a stalwart, fall bloomer with succulent foliage and dense, dome-shaped clusters of flowers that start out pink, darken to rose and then to russet red.

Last but not least, **Yarrow** (*Achillea millefolium*) is a true summer season winner. Its disc-shaped white flowers are like runways for landing bees and butterflies. It boasts soft, ferny foliage and hybrids are available most commonly in yellow, pink and russet.

For more information about low-water perennials or any other gardening topic, call the Master Gardeners at 541-548-6088 or go to our website [www.gocomga.com](http://www.gocomga.com) and click on the KPOV tab on the orange bar. This has been Gardening: Get Good at It on KPOV, The Point.

**Resources**

Detweiler, Amy Jo, (2020). “Water-wise Gardening in Central Oregon,” [**https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/em9136**](https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/em9136) (Accessed February 2021)

Pokorny, Kym (2019). “Ten low-water, high-impact perennials that thrive in dry conditions,” **http://today.oregonstate.edu/news/10-low-water-perennials-thrive-dry-situations**. (Accessed February 2021)