

YardSmart

# Perennials

There are many beautiful, water wise perennials that thrive in Calgary. Add these beauties and enjoy a yard that's easy on the environment and low maintenance too.



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“Watching plants flourish is the ultimate gardening reward. And the best way to achieve that reward is to choose the right plant for the right location.” – Kath Smyth

## Kath’s perennial top picks

### Plants that thrive in Calgary

Certified horticulturist and fifth generation Albertan, Kath Smyth is passionate about helping Calgarians create beautiful yards that are easy on the wallet, and the environment too. She credits her mother and grandfather for inspiring her gardening passion. “They both loved gardening and had fabulous yards. Watching them, I learned what worked and didn’t work when it comes to growing in the prairies.

Combining the right flowers, trees and shrubs together can pack a powerful beauty punch! Kath has some great tips on plants and shrubs that look great together!

“The plants they loved still stand today as some of my favourite plants,” she says. When recommending plants to Calgarians she generally sticks to plants that are native or well-adapted to Calgary’s zone 3 growing conditions.

“Watching plants flourish is the ultimate gardening reward,” says Kath. And the best way to achieve that reward is to choose the right plant for the right location. Choosing a location that suits a plant’s growing needs (such as sun, shady, part shade) means they will be healthier and better able to fight off disease and pests. When planted in the right spot, Kath’s favourites can generally survive with little water once established (usually after two growing seasons).

## Kath’s picks for sunny locations

### ‘Karl Foerster’ Feather Reed Grass – *Calamagrostis x acutiflora* ‘Karl Foerster’



This is a favourite because of its great performance and stiff, upright habit providing interest in all seasons. It is ideal for creating a low screen or hedge and provides a good backdrop for more colourful perennials.

Size: six feet tall and two feet wide.

Plant it with: perennial geraniums, Magnus purple coneflower, rudbeckia ‘Goldsturm’, Russian sage, Turkestan burning bush.

### ‘Elijah Blue’ Blue Fescue – *Festuca glauca* ‘Elijah Blue’



Blue fescue is a diverse plant. Plant it in groups as a groundcover or as an accent in a rock garden. Plant ‘Elijah Blue’ at the base of tall shrubs or tall perennials, such as lilies, to help them blend with the landscape. I like the seed heads that turn tan when mature and add colour throughout winter.

Size: one foot tall and two feet wide.

Plant it with: May night Salvia, poppies, ‘blazing star’ liatris, perennial geranium, Stella d’Oro daylily, goldfinger potentilla.

### ‘David’ Phlox – *Phlox paniculata* ‘David’



This is a truly stunning flower, and is fragrant! This is the phlox for you if you have had bad luck with phlox because of powdery mildew (a disease that can ruin phlox foliage before the end of the season).

Size: 3 1/2 feet tall and three feet wide.

Plant it with: red leaf rose, gaillardia, lilies, Stella d’Oro daylily.

### ‘Fire Witch’ Dianthus – *Dianthus* ‘Fire Witch’ (also called ‘Feuerhexe’)



This has bright, pink, fragrant flowers in late-spring which continues off and on through fall. It’s wonderful at the front of a sunny border and is a star planted among rocks.

Size: eight inches tall and two feet wide.

Plant it with: sedums, May night Salvia, rose glow barberry

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**Baptisia – *Baptisia australis***



This is one of my favourite perennials of all time! It seems to have everything going for it – heat, drought, deer and rabbit resistant. It thrives in sun but tolerates part shade and doesn’t need to be divided.

The seed heads are lovely if you do not deadhead it; and the blue-green foliage looks great in the garden from spring to fall.

Size: five feet tall and two feet wide.

Plant it with: Siberian iris, perennial geranium, alliums.

**‘Goldsturm’ Black-Eyed Susan – *Rudbeckia fulgida* ‘Goldsturm’**



You’ll find these in a vase on my kitchen table when they bloom in August into September. It fills the garden with deep yellow flowers. Tolerates clay soil.

Size: two feet tall and two feet wide.

Plant it with: perennial geraniums, Magnus purple coneflower, Russian sage, Turkestan burning bush.

**‘Magnus’ Purple Coneflower – *Echinacea purpurea* ‘Magnus’**



This is a great cut flower and is valued for its cone-shaped seed heads. Its magenta-pink blooms last from mid to late summer and attract butterflies. It is heat and drought tolerant. As a bonus, many gardeners find this plant to be deer and rabbit resistant.

Size: four feet tall and two feet wide.

Plant it with: perennial geraniums, Rudbeckia ‘Goldsturm’, Russian sage, Turkestan burning bush.

**‘May Night’ Salvia – *Salvia nemorosa* ‘May Night’**



Its dark purple spikes look amazing against light-coloured flowers or variegated foliage. It holds up to heat, drought, deer and rabbits.

Size: two feet tall and two feet wide.

Plant it with: Diabolo ninebark, Fire Witch dianthus, Russian sage, ‘Husker Red’ penstemon.

**‘Husker Red’ Penstemon – *Penstemon digitalis* ‘Husker Red’**



One of the easiest perennials you can grow, it bears purple-red foliage and white flowers all summer long. It’s native to areas of southeastern and central North America so it stands up well to heat and humidity.

Size: three feet tall and two feet wide.

Plant it with: Diabolo ninebark, May night Salvia, Fire Witch dianthus.

**Russian Sage – *Perovskia atriplicifolia***



I cannot think of a finer plant for the late-summer garden than Russian sage. It thrives in hot, dry spots and produces silvery foliage topped with clouds of lavender-blue flowers at the end of the season. The foliage is nicely scented, too, which also makes it unappetizing to deer and rabbits.

Size: five feet tall and three feet wide.

Plant it with: Diabolo ninebark, May night Salvia, Fire Witch dianthus.

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**Common Peony – *Paeonia lactiflora***



This is a classic and essential to my garden because my Mum had one and so did my Grandpa.

These provide fragrant pink, burgundy or white flowers in June – gorgeous! I also love the foliage because it changes colour in the fall. It's a long-lived flower and you'll find original plants still looking great in some of Calgary's oldest communities.

Size: two to four feet tall and three feet wide.

Plant it with: Ivory Halo dogwood, clustered Bellflower, David phlox.

**Clustered Bellflower – *Campanula glomerata* 'Superba'**



This provides showy clusters of purple blooms all summer and forms a large clump of dark green leaves. It makes a great cut flower and the more you pick it the more flowers are produced. Do not confuse it with creeping bellflower (*Campanula rapunculoides*), which is more upright and is an invasive, noxious weed.

Size: two feet tall and two feet wide.

Plant it with: Ivory Halo dogwood, clustered bellflower, David phlox.

**'Silver Mound' – *Artemisia schmidtiana***



I think this plant lights up in the dark with its low cushion of silver-grey textured foliage that complements nearly all other perennials. It looks great along an edge of the garden and looks particularly good next to white or blue flowers. It does well in hot, dry, sunny conditions.

Cut it back after its spring flush of growth to prevent the plant from flopping open midsummer.

Size: one foot tall and 1 1/2 feet wide.

Plant it with: silver mound artemesia, Blazing star liatris, Goldfinger potentilla.

**'Kobold' Blazing Star – *Liatris spicata* 'Kobold'**



This is a selection from a native prairie wildflower. It has spikey blooms of pink that butterflies love, and grass-like foliage. It thrives in hot, dry locations.

Size: two feet tall and 1 1/2 feet wide.

Plant it with: silver mound artemesia, Goldfinger potentilla, Rosy glow barberry.

**'Stella d'Oro' Daylily – *Hemerocallis* 'Stella d'Oro'**



This is so easy to grow and provides yellow trumpet-shaped, fragrant blooms all summer.

Size: one foot tall and two feet wide.

Plant it with: Goldfinger potentilla, Rosy glow barberry, clustered bellflower, David phlox.

# Kath's picks for shady locations

## Variegated Solomon's Seal – *Polygonatum odoratum* 'Variegatum'



I love the interest this provides over the seasons. In the spring it has white flowers. In the summer it provides variegated (green/white) foliage and in the autumn it turns gold. It's a North American native plant.

Size: two feet tall and two feet wide.

Plant it with: ferns, bleeding heart, lungwort.

## Brunnera 'Jack Frost' – *Brunnera macrophylla* 'Jack Frost'



This has stunning, silver-variegated leaves that look good from spring to fall and clusters of sky-blue forget-me-not flowers in spring.

Size: two feet tall and two feet wide.

Plant it with: daffodils, bleeding heart, gold flame spirea.

## 'Sprite' Astilbe – *Astilbe simplicifolia* 'Sprite'



This provides pink, feather-like plumes in early summer over finely textured rich green foliage.

Size: two feet tall and three feet wide.

Plant it with: hostas, ferns, bleeding hearts, Ivory Halo dogwood.

## Queen of the Prairie – *Filipendula rubra*



It's an easy-to-grow wild flower with fluffy, cotton-candy like heads of fragrant pink flowers and toothed, dark-green foliage that is a good accent to the blooms. I like it as a striking backdrop for a shaded perennial border.

Size: two feet tall and three feet wide.

Plant it with: hostas, ferns, bleeding hearts, gold flame spirea, Ivory Halo dogwood.

## Old-Fashioned Bleeding Heart – *Dicentra spectabilis*



This is a favourite of mine because it was by the front step at my grandparents' house, and grandpa had an elaborate story about the plant. It stands out in a shade garden with its pink or white heart-shaped flowers that hang from elegant, arching stems in late May to early June. The foliage should be cut back after flowering finishes.

Size: three feet tall and three feet wide.

Plant it with: hostas, ferns, bleeding hearts, Ivory Halo dogwood.

## Hosta – *Hosta* spp.



Hostas are among the showiest and easy-to-grow perennials in the shade and offer a great deal of variety. Choose from miniatures that stay only a couple of inches wide or giants that sprawl six feet across or more. Look for leaves in shades of green, blue, white and gold, with many cultivars being variegated. Some hosta flowers are very fragrant. Hostas are more drought-tolerant than many gardeners realize, still they may require more water than other shade plants listed.

Top picks: 'Blue Mouse Ears' offers silvery-blue leaves and stays one foot wide; 'Frances Williams' offers thick, blue-green leaves and grows two feet wide; 'Sum and Substance' grows six feet wide.

Plant it with: ferns, bleeding hearts, brunnera.

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## Kath's picks for shady locations (continued)

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### Lungwort – *Pulmonaria saccharata* 'Mrs Moon'



Lungwort earned its name from the silvery, lung-shaped spots that dot the foliage. The foliage does well all season long, but should be cut back after the plant finishes flowering.

The foliage is somewhat hairy so deer and rabbits typically leave lungwort alone.

Size: one foot tall and two feet wide.

Plant it with: hostas, ferns, bleeding hearts, ivory halo dogwood.

### Lamium – *Lamium maculatum*



This groundcover produces clusters of pink or white flowers that can rebloom off and on through the summer, creating months of colour. Even when it is not blooming, the silver-infused foliage brightens up shady corners.

Top picks: 'White Nancy' offers white flowers and silver foliage with a green edge; 'Beacon Silver' bears pink flowers and silvery leaves.

Size: eight inches tall and two feet wide.

Plant it with: bleeding hearts, Queen of the Prairie.

## Kath's picks for part shade

### Bloody Geranium – *Geranium sanguineum*



I fell in love with this plant at first sight! It produces dark pink flowers, from early summer all the way to frost, and mounds of foliage that turns bronze-red in fall.

Size: one foot tall and three feet wide.

Plant it with: Sem False spirea, ivory halo dogwood.

### Goat's Beard – *Aruncus dioicus*



Choose this for a spectacular border plant. It has plumes of creamy-white flowers and lacy leaves. I like it standing on its own in a border.

Size: five feet tall and four feet wide.

Plant it with: lamium, astilbe, Clavey's dwarf honeysuckle.

### Siberian Iris – *Iris sibirica*



This adds colour to flower beds in early summer, and vertical accents all summer long. The blooms rise above the tall grass like foliage. Colours include white, blue, yellow. Established plantings tolerate dry soil but are also very tolerant of wet sites.

Size: two feet tall and two feet wide.

Plant it with: Grand Marshall Bee Balm, Clavey's dwarf honeysuckle.

### 'Grand Marshall' Bee Balm – *Monarda didyma* 'Grand Marshall'



This is a wonderful plant for attracting butterflies and bees. It's a prairie native with shaggy flowers in purple and fragrant clumps of dark foliage. This is a Canadian selection that is resistant to powdery mildew.

Size: two feet tall and two feet wide.

Plant it with: ferns, hostas, gold flame spirea.

For more great plant choices for Calgary, visit [calgary.ca/yardsmart](http://calgary.ca/yardsmart). Also check out the YardSmart trees and shrubs brochure for Kath's suggestions on trees and shrubs that do well in Calgary and go great with her perennial top picks!