

Container Garden Workshops

“Powerful Perennials in Container Gardens”

May 16 & 23, 2015

Written by Cathy Testa of Container Crazy CT

The Theme – Powerful Perennials

Perennials, which return year after year in your gardens (or more technically stated, are a plant that normally survives for three or more seasons), are excellent candidates in container gardens and patio pots.

However, they are often overlooked for this use and many people do not understand their amazing benefits in container gardens or know which to select to achieve stunning combinations to make your container gardens look amazing in your outdoor surroundings!

This year’s Container Garden Workshops hosted by Cathy Testa of Container Crazy CT in Broad Brook, CT will focus on perennials which perform beautifully in container gardens and patio pots, and how and why you should use them to your advantage.

Burst of “Dynamic” Color Periods

We all love color – and know that many annual plants provide constant color in your container gardens, but so do perennials. Many perennials bloom at specific times during the season so they add a dynamic element to your containers. Some are short bloomers for a period of weeks, while other are long lasting for several months – It is a matter of knowing which perform best to maximize their show in your container gardens. Think of perennials as providing a burst of color at the right times to compliment the other mix of plants in your container gardens and patio pots.

For example, a blue flowering perennial, called *Agastache* ‘Blue Fortune’, which also goes by the common name of anise hyssop has a very long lasting soft blue flowers in summer. The blooms start in July and continue blooming all the way into September. Not only is that long-lasting, if you find the blooms look tired towards the end of the summer, you only have to snip them off from the tall stems of the plant, and guess what? Within two weeks, you will see new fresh buds forming and opening up on your plant in the container garden.

Don’t Get Exhausted

Perennials don’t peter out as quickly as annuals because most do not profusely bloom during the entire summer which takes lots of energy, and they have reserves from previous year’s growth, unlike annuals, such as a petunias. Petunias, as an example, usually look tired or worn out by the end of August. I’m not saying annuals don’t rock in container gardens because they

do and they are a must have – but people often overlook the values and bonuses of using perennials in container gardens and only consider them for the gardens of the ground.

Are Stars in Containers

Some perennials are aggressive spreaders in gardens, but when used in container gardens, they turn into stars. An example is the perennial, *Ajuga reptans*, also by the common name of bugleweed. You may know this one too. In the spring time, this low growing, ground cover looking perennial spikes up tons of purple flowers in May; they are noticeable. However, they also have a habit of spreading in lawns – which is a nuisance. This perennial actually travels from one spot to the next underground – so folks who desire perfect lawns dislike this plant.

In a container garden, however, the spreading issue of *Ajuga* is eliminated, but because it is a tenacious plant, it will return in a container garden for several years; it shines during the growing season with various foliage colors and tidy habit serving as an exception filler in container gardens with other mixed arrangements.

Ajuga reptans is just one of the many examples of perennials which can be vigorous or quick spreaders in the ground, but is not a problem in a container. The flush of purple color from its blooms is beautiful in a container especially when combined with other spring colored plants like the soft yellow of daffodils or pinks of tulips. Or it can serve as a very long lasting foliage feature in your container gardens, and this perennial doesn't get lots of problems.

For this upcoming Container Garden Workshop in 2015, I ordered two cultivars of *Ajuga reptans*: 'Burgundy Glow' and *Ajuga* 'Chocolate Chip.' Both of these cultivars I have used in containers and patio pots with wonderful results.

'Burgundy Glow' has white, pink and purple variegation on its leaves with 6" spikes of blue flowers in May, and 'Chocolate Chip' has intense violet-blue spikes rising 3" above miniature, vibrant, chocolate-hued foliage in May through June. One year, I used 'Chocolate Chip' in a little container and it was so pretty, and this one can take shady conditions too.

Ornamental grasses or grass-like Perennials

You may not think of ornamental grasses or grass like perennials as container garden plants but two of these which I can name right off the bat are *Hakonechloa macra* 'All Gold' and its counter opposite in regards to color is *Liriope muscari* 'Big Blue'.

Hakonechloa macra 'All Gold' is one of many hakon grasses I selected for this workshop because it has stunning gold blades of foliage that grows in graceful clumps and the color is intense and vivid. Take that intense vivid color and put it next to the right color bloom of another perennial – and voila – you have eye magic or eye candy.

Then there's *Liriope muscari* 'Big Blue', the polar opposite in color compared to the hakon grass – it has a dark green long strap-like leaves – and it is not an ornamental grass but a perennial, so it, like ornamental grasses, it returns year after year and is tough too.

Lily turf is *Liriope's* common name, and it can be used to cover lots of turf – because it does spread – so this one fits my “Troublemaker Turned Star” scenarios for container gardens. It is a strong grower which is a problem in landscape situations, but it makes a wonderful low height type thriller with 15-18” long leaves with violet flower spikes in late summer in containers and patio pots! I’ve used *Liriope* in containers and it comes back every single year – it’s tough! This enables me to reuse it and just add new supporting candidates with it in the pot every season.

Other Perennial Benefits

There are other wonderful benefits to using perennials in your pots – Again, they return, as mentioned above, for at least three or more years - so this saves you money; they may be transplanted into your gardens or yard after the summer season is over in the fall, so you will enjoy them for years to come; and they give a dynamic bloom period or show at specific times in your container gardens. This gives your container a living interest because suddenly, in the midst of summer, a burst of a new color opens in the blooms of a perennial in the container, or perhaps it is an early spring bloomer or late bloomer in the fall – either way, it adds a new interest for you to enjoy and view. It is the ta-da of container gardening.

Perennial Purposes

Perennials also serve lots of other wonderful purposes. They have fragrant foliage and flowers, many can be used as a cut flower for your vases, and they attract butterflies and bees – and others have medicinal purposes too.

There will be varieties for sun and shade available at these two workshops in May 2015. A total of 120 perennial plants have been ordered, 6 each of 23 species. Learning their features and how to use them with other plants in the containers will be part of this workshops offerings.

Tropical Additions

Tropical plants with large, lush foliage features will be part of the Container Garden Workshops this year as well – because they are a passion and, like perennials, they have great benefits – the ability to reuse them year after year when appropriately stored over the winter, the showy role they plant due to their ability to grow fast, and their adaptability to warm climates, which is what we have here in CT during the summer months. Many tropical will last all the way into October with no signs of stress, giving you a real show until the first frost of fall arrives.

Every year, elephant ears (*Colocasia*), banana plants (*Ensete* and *Musa*), and some other unique tropical plants are offered as part of this workshop. Pairing up a dark toned elephant ear, such as *Colocasia* ‘Maui Magic’ with a vivid bloom of a perennial has dramatic effects in containers, and in this workshop you will see how it’s done.

A total of 185 tropical plants have been ordered, 8 each of 21 species, and learning their features and how to use them with other plants in the containers will be part of this workshops offerings.

Pinboards – Perennials with Power for Container Gardens

Start visiting my pinboard titled, *Perennials with Power for Container Gardens*, to get a glimpse of what the featured perennials and tropical plants will be at the Container Garden Workshops scheduled on May 16th and May 23rd, 2015. I will be adding photos up until the workshop dates. This will give you an idea of what will be featured, and some are shown in container gardens and patio pots too.

Two Workshop Date Options

This year, the workshop is being offered on two dates. There are some considerations beyond your calendar's availability on which date you may want to select. Both sessions will have the same topics and materials available. More details of what is included in the class is listed on www.ContainerCrazyCT.com, click **MAY CLASS (BIG CONTAINER GARDEN)** under the Nature with Art Programs menu.

May 16, Saturday – Session No. 1:

The May 16th date is probably after our typical spring frost date but we won't know until we hit April. Experts say we are "almost guaranteed" to not get frost from May 10th through September 26th, but after our winter and global changes – do we trust weather guarantees anymore?

This means if you elect to attend session no. 1 on May 16th, your containers may require protection if we get an overnight frost. Frost is not as harsh to perennials, but will affect tropicals. If you are okay with moving your pot or covering it with a light sheet if forecasters say we will get a frosting, then May 16th is for you.

May 23, Saturday – Session No. 2:

The May 23rd date will be safe – however, it is Memorial Day weekend, and schedules tend to be busy – but with that said, nothing is better than placing your newly arranged container garden out on your deck or patio just in time for the festivities.

Registration one of 3 ways:

1. Visit the Facebook page for **Container Crazy CT** and click on **EVENTS** to join.
2. Complete the **Contact Form** found at the bottom of the class pages from the top-menu bars of www.ContainerCrazyCT.com.
3. Email containercathy@gmail.com or call **(860) 977-9473**

Payment:

\$15 per person + cost of plants purchased at the class. Payment of class fee of \$15 is required by mail one month prior to the class date. Payment is non-refundable for any cancellations one week prior to the class date. Sales tax is applicable on all plant purchases during the class.

Send to: Cathy T's Landscape Designs, 72 Harrington Road, Broad Brook, CT 06016

