

Planting for Summer Bloom

By Charles Hildebrandt Photos by Mike Davis

We have now arrived at the second stage of our gardening efforts. All the summer blooming plants, the tender ones, are now going into the soil, the dahlias, begonias, hibiscus, freesia, calla lilies, pelargoniums for our window boxes, gladioli for cut flowers. Despite our aversion to chemicals, incidentally, we can not get away from them when planting the corms of gladioli. If we omit to dust them or the soil where they are to be planted, we may lose their flowers to the working of thrips.

We can now have a field day with annuals, filling the spaces between our roses, our peonies, with fast growing cosmos,

with California poppies, with the various types of marigold, of impatiens, and then line the edges of the bed with alyssum, alternating with the misty blue of the ageratum, or the low-growing lobelia. The once so-fashionable petunia has been



Phlox blooms generously for weeks.

a trifle overworked and has lately lost some of its popular appeal.

Iris have already gone in. They make a lovely splash together with peonies, as is so well demonstrated in the Laking section of the Royal Botanical Gardens. Daylilies (*Hemerocallis*), a species that has had the benefit of much hybridization, show vigorous growth. A large variety of shapes and colours of this once-weedy plant has been bred, so that daylilies as a group are no longer confined to the infertile soil that covers the road-

sides. True, daylilies bloom only for one day, but there is no end to new flower heads appearing from the same plant.

A highly fragrant annual is the tobacco-related nicotiana. It looks a bit like phlox, but isn't. We plant it where on mild summer evenings the perfume drafts over to our sitting area, enough to make the evening a romantic event. Phlox, by the way, is a native of our area,

and we can spot it in nature's wild garden, where we recognize it by its five flower petals, in contrast with the common *Hesperis matronalis* which has four petals. This widely occurring immigrant is also known by the uninspiring name Dame's Rocket, but the name *Hesperis*, from the Greek *hesperios*, which means evening, describes so much more accurately its sweet, all-pervading evening scent.



Daylilies give many one-day flowers on each plant.

With all this aroma in the air, made even stronger by the fragrance of the lily of the valley, we must give attention to our lilac. The *Syringa* genus is not native and was introduced to this continent a long time ago, possibly



Pale pink peonies make a big impact.

by the early French settlers. It has since been cultivated into hundreds of varieties. Some of the most popular ones are found in the highly fragrant single-flowered forms, such as the mauve pink of *Lamartine*, the Wedgewood blue of *President Lincoln* and the pure white of *Mont Blanc*. The double-flowered forms may be prettier but lack the intense perfume of the former group.

Everybody has lilac. No garden is without it and rightly so. Occasionally we also find the plant in the wilderness. Since it is not indigenous, the bushes, often grouped in straight or circular patterns, must have been planted by homesteaders whose abodes, abandoned now, can often be identified by the broken-down stone foundation, sometimes by a few pieces of lumber lying around the site.

Some lilac, deep in the bush where neither road nor path is evident, has been planted by that strange part of humanity, the hermits. The pursuit of living alone in the Canadian wilderness, in a forest that has many faces, some of them grass-covered rocks loved by these people, is no more. Their lifestyle, as difficult as it was romantic, has succumbed to cell phone, to email, to

global interaction and the other trappings of our modern society.

An addition to our garden structure, a feature of many uses, is a well-placed gazebo or even nothing more elaborate than a set of tables and chairs. Isn't it relaxing to sit outside on an evening, when the heat of the day is subsiding? Before the stars appear, we watch the grandiose formation of the clouds, transforming the glow of the sun into radiating streamers that break through the cloud cover like so many shooting stars. And it doesn't take much imagination to see the entrance to the nordic Valhalla up there, open to admit the Valkyries.

Then, when darkness has folded the wings of the day, the bats appear, circling round and round, diving abruptly to catch a flying insect, helping us to reduce mosquitoes and other such blood-sucking pests. And if the season is right, the fireflies dart through the air, enticing their female partners, the glow worms, that sit motionless on the vegetation, to answer their signals. ■

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