



Early Spring Blooming Perennials

One of the first signs of spring is the emergence of crocuses, daffodils, and other spring-flowering bulbs. Several other perennials also bloom in early spring and complement these familiar bulbs. Wake up perennial beds and borders with any of the following as a prelude to peonies, bearded irises, and other later blooming perennials.

Pig Squeak (*Bergenia cordifolia*) has large, shiny, semi-evergreen leaves. The green leaves often turn red or maroon in winter. Several new cultivars have purple foliage. Pink or white flowers are a second ornamental feature and are produced in clusters atop 12 to 18 inch tall scapes or stalks. Plants perform well in full sun to part shade and are adaptable to a wide variety of soils. A planting site that shelters plants from strong winds will prevent tattering and browning of the foliage during winter.

a consistent supply of moisture. Heartleaf brunnera works well in combination with hostas and lungworts.



Lenten Rose (*Helleborus orientalis*) is a semi-evergreen to evergreen perennial that is usually one of the first plants to bloom. The nodding, bell-like flowers appear in March and

range in color from creamy white, to pink, to burgundy. Plants grow 15 to 18 inches tall. Lenten rose is more demanding than many other perennials. Plants require fertile, moist, well-drained soil in part shade. Lenten rose performs best in protected sites, as the leathery leaves can be scorched or torn by strong winter winds. A planting site near the house will provide a little extra warmth and a close-up view of its lovely flowers.



Heartleaf Brunnera (*Brunnera macrophylla*) is a low growing, 12 to 18 inch tall mounding perennial with small, blue flowers that appear in early spring and continue for a month or more. The masses of true blue flowers are similar to

those of forget-me-not, hence another common name – perennial forget-me-not. The heart-shaped leaves remain clean and dark green throughout the summer and into fall. Several new cultivars have mottled silver or white foliage. Brunnera prefers part shade to shade and a moist, well-drained soil. However, it will tolerate full sun if it has



Candytuft (*Iberis sempervirens*) is another perennial with semi-evergreen to evergreen foliage. The flowers are pure white and can blanket the foliage for 2 to 4 weeks in spring. Candytuft has a low

growing, mounding habit reaching 6 to 12 inches tall. Plants work well in the front of the border or cascading slightly over a small wall. Plant it in full sun to part shade with some protection from winter winds. Look for cultivars like ‘Autumn Beauty’ for repeat blooms in early fall.

Crested Iris (*Iris cristata*) is one of the few irises that blooms in part shade. It is smaller than bearded iris (reaching only six inches in height) and has fewer insect and disease problems. Flower colors are somewhat limited – mainly blue, purple, yellow, pink, and white. Crested iris prefers full sun to part shade and a well-drained soil. Plants are well suited to woodland and rock gardens.



Virginia Bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*) is a native woodland wildflower. Flowers are borne in nodding clusters. Pink buds open into trumpet-shaped, light blue flowers. The 1 to 2 foot tall plants die back to

the ground by early summer. Because of their ephemeral nature, Virginia bluebells are often planted between slower growing perennials. Plants prefer moist sites in partial shade. Plants often reseed and spread in favorable sites.

Moss Phlox (*Phlox subulata*) is noted for its bright carpets of color for 2 to 4 weeks in spring. Flower colors include white, pink, lavender, and bi-colors. The foliage is dark green, needle-like, and evergreen. Plant height is 5 to 7 inches, making it a wonderful edging or rock garden plant. Moss phlox prefers full sun and requires well-drained soils.



Lungwort or Bethlehem Sage (*Pulmonaria saccharata*) is a 10 to 18 inch tall, mounding perennial noted for its attractive foliage. The dark green leaves are often speckled with silvery

white spots. The foliage of some cultivars has more silver than green. Although the foliage is the main ornamental feature, the flowers are lovely as well, and can be white, pink, or blue – some even change from pink to blue. Lungwort performs best in part shade and a fertile, moist, well-drained soil.



Pasque Flower (*Pulsatilla vulgaris*) is a compact perennial that grows well in full sun to part shade. The pasque flower produces purple, maroon, or white flowers atop finely dissected foliage. The flower buds and seed heads (which develop after flowering) are covered with long, gray-white

hairs, giving the plant a fuzzy appearance. Plants are only 4 to 6 inches tall when blooming, with seed heads that can eventually reach a height of 10 to 12 inches. Plants would easily get lost in the summer garden if it were not for the interesting seed heads. Pasque flower prefers fertile, well-drained soil.



Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*), a member of the poppy family, is found in moist woodlands throughout Iowa. Plants bloom over a 2 to 4 week period in late March and April. Individual flowers

often last only one or two days. The single white flower contains 8 to 16 petals. As the plant emerges in spring, the leaf is tightly curled around the flower stalk. The multi-lobed leaf begins to unfurl during bloom, eventually attaining a width of 8 to 10 inches. Leaves persist until late summer. Below ground, bloodroot produces thick, tuber-like roots. The common name, bloodroot, refers to the bright red sap which oozes from the root when cut or broken. Bloodroot performs best in shady woodland and garden settings.

A few other early spring bloomers include: **snowdrop anemone** (*Anemone sylvestris*), **basket-of-gold** (*Aurinia saxatilis*), **Dutchman's breeches** (*Dicentra cucullaria*), **bleeding heart** (*Lamprocapnos spectabilis*), **creeping phlox** (*Phlox stolonifera*), **trilliums** (*Trillium* spp.), and **violets** (*Viola* spp.). Try these perennials in your garden and watch them herald the coming of spring.

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