Perennial that promise summer-long color
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Yes, indeed, you can have your cake and eat it, too. Many perennial flowering plants give you a short blast of glorious color and then return to leaves-only mode, if they bloom at all.

But you can end the perennial agony if you choose plants that bloom from summer to frost and are as indestructible as they can be in Transylvania County’s climate.

Of course, perennials spread, some more than others, so your investment in pricier perennials will pay you back over the years. Most of them are deer resistant, solving yet another problem that our gardeners here frequently encounter.

Here’s my list of low-maintenance flowering perennials that give summer-long bang for your gardening buck:

**Rudbeckia:** Also known as black-eyed Susan, these are a personal favorite. Their eye-popping burst of golden color in late July makes them a great accent for any part of your garden. They require little to no maintenance (I put a small fence around mine to keep them from tumbling into the path) and they’ll bloom non-stop for two months or more in a sunny well-drained area. They’ll even food well in partial shade and they’re drought tolerant, although that doesn’t seem to be a problem in Transylvania County this year.

**Coreopsis:** Feathery foliage and light airy daisy-like flowers make coreopsis another favorite. They’re easy to grow in well-drained sunny locations and drought tolerant one they are established. Most varieties need to be deadheaded to re-bloom, but look for the “Big Bang” varieties that do not need deadheading. Coreopsis comes in all pastel colors as well as hot pink, orange and ruby red.

**Geranium:** Not to be confused with the red and pink annual geraniums, perennial geraniums will last and multiply. Most commonly found in purple and blue shades, they’ll bloom from early summer until frost. They need full sun and well-drained soil. They may start to look a little gangly by late summer, but pruning them back will produce new growth and abundant new flowers.

**Spider wort:** Another personal favorite, spider worts are the gift that keeps on giving and giving. They grow from tubers and will multiply with abandon, if that is what you want. If not, beware! They are mostly purple and magenta and will bloom every afternoon until late
summer, when they may need to be cut back for re-blooming, like geraniums.

**Re-blooming day lilies:** Stella de Oro is the most common of the re-blooming day lilies with golden flowers nested among the spiky leaves. Recently, other colors have become available, including pink, salmon and ruby shades. At about 24-inches tall, they are shorter than the brief-blooming day lily varieties, so they make a good border plant and require virtually no maintenance except to cut them back at the end of the growing season.

**Russian sage:** This long-lived plant is not really usable as a spice, but give you silvery leaves and small pale-blue to purple flowers that are hummingbird and butterfly magnets. The common varieties can be quite tall--up to four feet--but there are now some shorter varieties like Lacey Blue and Little Spire that can top out at 24 inches. Like most perennials, Russian sage requires full sun.

**Astillbe:** This is one long-bloomer that will thrive in shade, a boon to our many shade gardeners. Its fern-like foliage and delicate feathery blooms come in white, pink and red. Although not quite as long blooming and their sun-loving cousins, astilbe will bloom for several weeks from early summer through early August. They’re a great choice for brightening up a shady spot or adding texture to a sea of shade-loving hostas and heucheras. This pest-resistant plant requires slightly most soil and needs no deadheading.

**Gardening tasks for early June:**
- Water newly planted trees and shrubs once a week if it does not rain. Weekly deep watering is better than shallow daily watering.
- Remove foliage of spring flowering bulbs that have yellowed and died back. Thin bulbs. Dig, divide, replant or store in cool dry place for fall planting.
- Pinch back chrysanthemums for bushy plants and side dress with bone meal and fertilizer.
- Prune abelia, forsythia, privets, mock orange, deautzia, althea, bush honeysuckle, weigelia and euonymus.
- For bushy well-shaped plants that bloom profusely, prune shrubs as they grow.

*Do you have a question for the Master Gardeners? Send your questions to the Transylvania Times or e-mail us c/o*
manymoons@citcom.net. The Master Gardener Telephone Clinic is also available to answer your garden questions from March through the end of October on Wednesdays from 10 a.m. to noon at 884-3239. Walk-ins are welcome during those hours at the Community Services Building, 98 E. Morgan St., Brevard. Master Gardeners work at the gardens of Silvermont every Thursday from 9 to 11 a.m. Drop by the ask questions, help or just enjoy the gardens!