

Five under-used late fall bloomers

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Night temperatures have hovered around freezing, but some gardens in the Klamath Basin are still showing signs of life. This late in the season, a few favorite late-blooming garden staples are in the palettes of most gardeners: fall mums, ornamental cabbages and kales, pansies every color of the rainbow and beyond. These tried and true ornamentals are some of the last to check out every garden season, with the kales and pansies often persisting into snow.

For those looking to expand late season bloom options in their gardens, some lesser known perennials are worthy of investigation. These can expand the variety of flower types, shapes and colors in the garden in fall- an aesthetic benefit to the humans and a potential food source for pollinators. Several have the overall “daisy” shape that make pollen access easier to a wide range of insects. Five suggestions for interesting flowers to fill out the late season bloom menu follow.

Helenium. The coneflower-lookalike flowers of this genus come in both annual and perennial types, in a wide range of colors perfect for fall- oranges, yellows, reds, burgundies, and combinations. These plants have been available for decades under the unfortunate name “sneezeweed”, making a prime opportunity for fall flower arranging material sound like something no one would want. Recent efforts to improve this plant’s standing in home gardens reflect the genus name, rather than referencing the use of leaves in snuff mixtures. Helenium is drought tolerant after establishment, another plus for Klamath gardeners. The plants are cold hardy and resistant to deer feeding.

Geum is another flower with common name and botanical genus the same. *Geum* is a genus in the rose family, and like roses, plants are seemingly easy to hybridize. Numerous colors in both single and double form, smooth and ruffled petals, show up in a computer search of plant catalogs. The anemone- like flowers are showy and colorful. Klamath gardeners should take care to choose cultivars wisely if late season bloom is the goal- not all Geum are late season bloomers. Double types are fun to look at, but are of less benefit to pollinators than the single petaled varieties.

Anise Hyssop is sometimes referred to as *Agastache*- the genus name for this group of mint family relatives. Anise Hyssop will spread over time, but is far less aggressive than true mints in the garden. This perennial makes a great cut flower- the spiky forms of Anise Hyssop play nicely with the rounded shapes of Helenium and Geum in a bouquet. Anise Hyssop has the added benefit of a light, pleasing fragrance akin to that of a floral herbal tea- in fact, the leaves are sometimes used in teas.

New England Asters. These perennial bursts of small daisies are prone to lodging (falling over) in the western part of the state where fall is often overcast or rainy: Klamath gardeners enjoy much more fall sunshine, so the long, heavy flower laden stems of *Aster Novi-belgii* stand up straighter and taller. Most commonly, nickel to quarter sized blooms of white, pink, hot pink, purple, or lavender form in clusters all along the stems. These asters are especially cold hardy.

Salvias are a genus of both annuals (i.e. the red-blooming *Salvia splendens*) and perennial garden plants. Of special note here are the later season bloomers like Mexican bush sage, *Salvia leucantha*. Mexican bush sage appears to have white and purple flowers: in fact the flowers are white, emerging from purple

specialized leaves called bracts. Like Geum, some salvia types bloom earlier in the season. Most Salvia blooms are in the blue to purple range, but yellow, red, and white flowering cultivars also exist. An independent garden center that grows some of its own perennials can be a great source for some of the unusual Salvia types. Some Salvias provide food for hummingbirds, butterflies, and other pollinators, and some last well as cut flowers.

For those seeking to support pollinators and other wildlife in the garden, having something blooming for as much of the gardening season as possible is an important strategy. Late season bloom can be difficult to achieve with flowers that bloom early and have spent their energy for the season. Late season bloomers often bloom late summer, then steadily until a hard, killing frost. These flowers supplement our native rabbitbrushes as the last flowers standing to provide pollen for nest provisioning of the season's final pollinators.