KPOV – *The Point*

Gardening: Get Good at It

“Early Perennial Bloomers”

November 20, 2018

T.S. Eliot famously wrote that April is the cruelest month. He hailed from St. Louis, Missouri, so how did he know so much about gardening in Central Oregon? April here *is* cruel but if you’re a gardener, so is May and sometimes June.

One way to combat the frustration of our short springs is to plant early bloomers in garden spots we can see from a cozy window. Snowdrop, crocus, miniature iris and daffodil are just some of the first spring bulb varieties to brighten our garden’s *sunny* spots. Finding alternatives for the shady ones is a bit trickier but definitely a rewarding challenge to tackle.

Actually, there are many hard-working beauties that thrive in Hardiness Zones 3, 4 and 5 that can extend our short gardening season -- and give us hope when we know we’re still weeks, if not a month or two, away from our last frost. Just be sure you approach your early-bloom efforts with Alfred Lord Tennyson’s upbeat attitude, that it’s better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.

So, what are some of the flowering, shade-loving plants that can add early-season color? A definite top contender is ***Hellebore***, commonly known as Lenten rose. This evergreen plant typically blooms in Central Oregon as early as February and holds its blossoms through April. It can bloom even in snow and freezing temperatures which makes it ideal for our erratic spring weather.

***Pulmonaria***, which goes by the unfortunate common name of Lungwort, is another early spring gem. This low-growing plant has brilliant blue, pink, and white flowers, and many change color as they mature and are pollinated. While they prefer partial or full shade, they can be set in sunny borders if they are surrounded by taller perennials that will shade them later in the season.

Another favorite early bloomer that prefers shade is ***Bergenia cordifolia,*** also called pigsqueak because of the sound you hear when you rub one of its leaves between your thumb and forefinger. While tolerant of a variety of soils, this clump-forming plant prefers humusy, moist beds. Its tall pink to purple flowers and waxy heart-shaped leaves are particularly striking when planted as a groundcover along a pathway or in a shady bed.

Wood Anemone ***(Anemone nemorisa* ‘Robinsoniana’)** boasts large, pale lavender-blue flowers which first show in March and April. Planted in light to deep shade, this easy-to-grow, 6’ to 12” ground cover is lovely in the spring and early summer though its leaves can dry up and disappear later in the heat if its preferred humusy soil isn’t kept moist.

One I haven’t yet tried is Bloodroot (***Sanguinaria canadensis***). One gardener described it as a tiny marvel with a big presence. Its bright white flowers emerge early and light up a shady garden bed. A second benefit of this plant is its blue-green leaves that provide a striking and unique blanket in the summer. It too prefers a rich, moist soil.

There are so many options to consider. Curl up and do some research this winter for what might work best in your garden but be sure to plan to visit our local nurseries when they open next spring to check out the early bloomers with strong track records in Central Oregon.

A final thought is a shout-out for the lowly dandelion (***Taraxacum officinale***) which plays an important role in the health and well-being of a great diversity of bees. Yes, it’s definitely considered a weed in our lawns, even more so in our flower beds, but it is an early bloomer and as such provides one of the first pollen-rich sources for bees. Further, thanks to the dandelion’s flower shape and structure, its pollen and nectar are especially accessible to bees throughout the year.

For more information on this or any other gardening topic, call the Master Gardeners at 541-548-6088 or go to our website [www.gocomga.com](http://www.gocomga.com) and click on the KPOV tab on the orange bar. This has been Gardening: Get Good at It on KPOV, The Point.

Resources:

“*Anemone nemorosa,”* Missouri Botanical Garden,

<http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder/PlantFinderDetails.aspx?taxonid=286193&isprofile=0&> (accessed October 2018)

Edmunds, Brooke; Little, Richard; Sagili, Ramesh. “Nurturing Mason Bees in Your Backyard in Western Oregon.” Feburary 2016. <https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/sites/catalog/files/project/pdf/em9130_0.pdf>

(accessed October 2018)

“Hellebores Cure the Late-Winter Blue,” *Fine Gardening*.

<https://www.finegardening.com/article/hellebores-cure-the-late-winter-blues> (accessed October 2018)

Ianotti, Marie, “Growing and Caring for Pulmonaria Plants.” *The Spruce*. August 2018. <https://www.thespruce.com/pulmonaria-1402859> (accessed October 2018)

Podcast: “Let’s Argue About Plants. Episode 1: Early Spring Bloomers.” *Fine Gardening.* April 2017. [**https://www.finegardening.com/article/episode-1-early-spring-bloomers**](https://www.finegardening.com/article/episode-1-early-spring-bloomers)(accessed October 2018)

Rhoades, Heather. “Types of Early Spring Blooming Flowers.” *Gardening Know How*. May 2018. [**https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/ornamental/flowers/fgen/early-spring-flowers.htm**](https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/ornamental/flowers/fgen/early-spring-flowers.htm) (accessed October 2018)