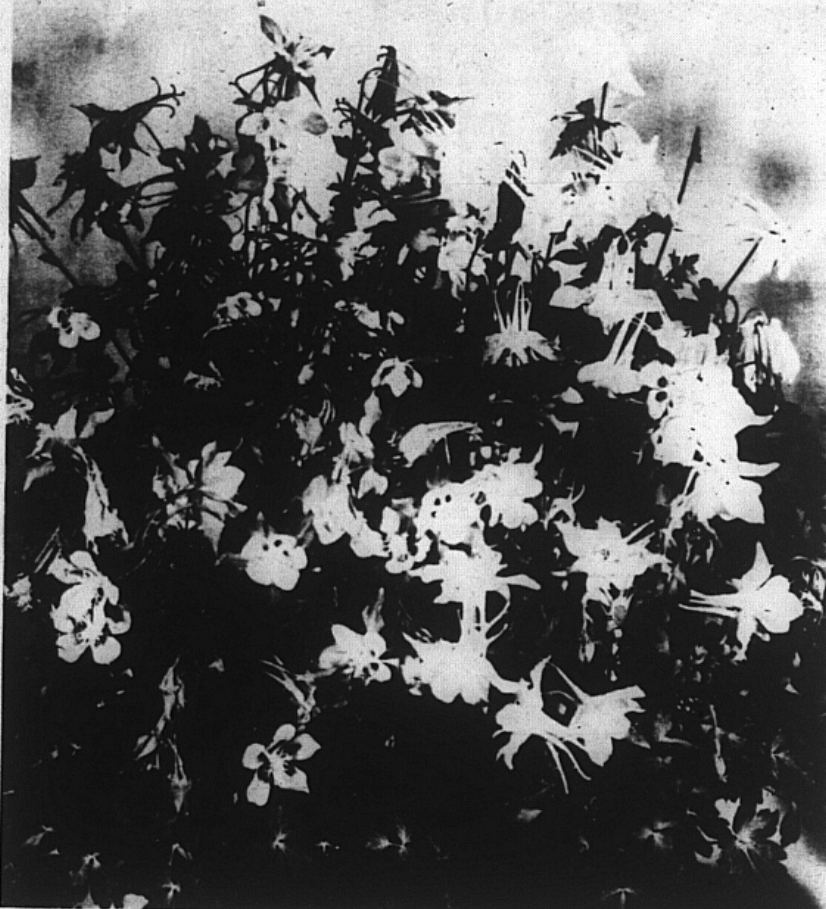


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The Columbine is a member of the perennial flower family. AP Laserphoto

# Perennial gardens: A source for everchanging beauty

My son came to visit recently, and I was able to get him to remove the sod from a steep bank in front of my house. I have been trying to replant this sunny bank with ground cover to eliminate some very awkward and painful lawn mowing. My son looked at the peony hedge and the carpet of wormwood and creeping phlox that I have planted so far and asked if these were biennials, the kinds of plants that come up every year?

Well, my son knows more about flowers than I did a dozen years ago when I had never even heard of the word biennial and the peonies and groundcovers do come up from the same roots every year, but they are perennials.

Defining perennials in this very general way is just the start of getting to know a large and varied group of plants. I was first attracted to perennials because I loved the idea that they came back every year and imagined that I would plant this flower garden one afternoon and spend the rest of my life admiring its static beauty. However, that is not the way gardens work, not even perennial gardens.

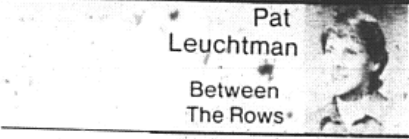
In the best of times, perennials will multiply and start crowding each other, or they multiply by popping up in unexpected places. Naturally, there are always weeds to contend with and in the worst of times, there will be blight or the winter snow will melt and there will simply be no sign of the plant you carefully put to bed in the fall. Or you realize your taste has changed since you put the red poppies next to the purple campanulas and plants must be changed and moved.

No, a perennial garden is not a place of static beauty; its loveliness is evanescent and everchanging.

If you have been tempted by the healthy green plants and their colorful flower labels at the nursery and planted a few perennials only to find out that the coronation gold achillea is growing in front of the delicate columbine, you could throw up your hands in dismay or you could get a copy of a good reference book on perennials like Lewis and Nancy Hill's Successful Perennial Gardening (Garden Way Publishing, \$16.95 paperback).

The Hills have been gardening and teaching about gardening in New England for many years. They understand the severity of our climate and take a very practical approach.

Successful Perennial Gardening is divided into three main sections. The first contains general information about improving the soil, planting techniques, starting



perennials from seed and dividing established plants. A successful gardener cannot ignore pests and disease, but the Hills are sensitive to the dangers of chemical controls. They encourage people to find the least dangerous solution and stress that proper planting and good sanitation are vital to preventing many problems. Their brief, but fact and advice-filled chapter on Designing Your Perennial Garden is a treasure.

The second section of the book is devoted to two to four page descriptions of 19 theme gardens such as A Perennial Pathway, Garden for a Shady Nook and A Fragrance Fragrance Garden. There is a black and white line drawing, some

general information about plants and ways they can be used together and a list of appropriate plants.

The only color in the book is a 16 page section, each page with four photographs - of a single plant or a planting containing several flowers.

The final section is a listing of descriptions of Perennials from anacanthus to yucca. There is a small black and white drawing of each flower, information about the plant, including its size, color and period of bloom, its needs and the kinds of problems it's prone to. There are also suggestions about how to use it and where to place it in the garden.

There are so many perennials and so many varieties in some families of plants that the list is necessarily limited, but this book will be helpful to the more experienced gardener as well as the novice.

The Hills write in a straight-forward, but chatty manner. They are knowledgeable, give sound advice and make all this information easily available by way of an informational table of contents, a glossary of terms and a good index. You might read parts of this book straight through, but if you have a particular question, you will find the answer easily.

# Modular homes coming of age

By LOU DOLINAR  
Newsday

The original modular home, ground out by the gross on factory assembly lines, was like the original Japanese car: small, basic, a little odd-looking and known for its cheap price tag.

But just as the Japanese have spiced up their cars and their profits, so have the makers of modulars. In large part, this phenomenon has been made possible by technical innovations that allow more design flexibility. In fact, the boxy, trailer-like look that characterized the original modulars has given way to two-story colonials, contemporary beach-style houses and traditional capes.

"Today, the factories can do almost anything a builder can," says Tony Laurino of Wedgefield Homes in Port Jefferson Station, N.Y. "We can offer them skylights, Jacuzzis, ceramic tile. It is not a trailer any more, it is a real house." His company sells homes built by Penn Lyon of Selinsgrove, Pa. Says Cathy Barham of Ryland Homes, of Columbia, Md.: "We have started to build homes that are characterized as move-up homes, not just for first-time buyers; we have some modulars that retail at \$375,000."

As modulars have matched site-built homes in size, quality, and design, their price has naturally increased. To some extent, this reflects the cost of providing additional amenities and more stylish designs. Increasingly, says Tom Melley of Quality Crafted Homes of Manorville, N.Y., homeowners are willing to trade some of their savings for higher quality. The one advantage over building from scratch that will never change, says Melley, is that "... I can always build it faster."

But for some dealers, according to several factory officials, the new prices are simply what the traffic will bear for homes that have become indistinguishable from mid-priced custom homes. "The dealers still have a tremendous cost advantage over custom builders," said one factory owner, "even if they don't always pass it on to the buyer."

In achieving respectability over the last few years, modulars have gone through a few design stages, from downright ugly, to acceptable, to anything goes. This has been achieved by factory engineers — architects are still the exception, not the rule — who have overcome some inherent limitations. The design problem is this: The individual building blocks of these homes must be shipped by truck to the construction sites. Thus, to fit on trailers that fit on the highways, the pieces can be no greater than 60 feet long, by 14 feet wide, by 13 feet high. The typical low-cost ranch is comprised of two of these long boxes, joined down the middle. Absent special reinforcing, this means rooms can be no more than 14 feet wide in one direction.

Height restrictions posed by highway overpasses particularly affect design: Roofs on some of the original modulars had to be nearly flat, with a pitch of only three feet for every 12 feet of width, a proportion that looked odd, to say the least.

An early esthetic innovation, which came into widespread use about three years ago, was the partially hinged roof. The center section of these roofs was folded down for transport, then lifted up again by

"Today, the factories can do almost anything a builder can. We can offer them skylights, Jacuzzis, ceramic tile. It is not a trailer any more, it is a real house."

Tony Laurino

crane at the job site. This system creates a steep pitch of five feet of height for every 12 feet of width, which is typical of the normal-looking ranch houses. L-shaped ranches are created by joining four of the basic building blocks, with this type of roofline, at right angles to each other.

But still, these roofs were not big enough for an attic or upstairs bedrooms and, stylistically, could not duplicate sharply pitched roofs, traditional capes and some popular contemporary designs.

To overcome the roof problem, more recently, manufacturers have been shipping more cleverly hinged designs that unfold like Swiss Army knives to match traditional Cape Cod styles, with pitches of 10 feet or more for every 12 of width. Besides looking better, this can create raw space upstairs amounting to one third to one half of the floor area of the downstairs, for finishing or expansion later. "It gets rid of the stigma of the boxy ranch house," says Benny Orlowski of E-Z Homes in Cutchogue, N.Y., a dealer for Contemporary Homes in Taylor, Pa.

For traditionalists, Cape Cod roofing systems are sometimes shipped with components for gable style dormers which are, in turn, assembled on site. Others, for extra space upstairs, employ shed type dormers. These roofing systems all have a price: more work on site, which tends to lessen the cost advantage of the modular builder.

The most unusual new approach to roofing comes from Stratton Homes in Stratton, Pa., which offers a so-called "reverse roof system." Unlike previous designs, this one orients the pitch of the roof along the long side of the house module. "You can get away from the boxy look to a greater degree, and you're free of the limitations of the conventionally sized boxes," says Marie Lewis of Stratton.

Interior rooms can be much larger using this system, and there is almost no limitation to the size of the house. But again, more site work, and high costs, are involved.

In general, most modular homes are built on spec, for resale by the builder, or as so called turnkey operations, in which the builder provides house, foundation, finish details, and, of course, the paperwork and the all-important certificate of occupancy.

Laurino is experimenting with a new low-cost option for the first time: home-buyer. Direct purchase of just the house, or of an unfinished house on a foundation. "Many people have the skills to file for permits and complete some of the work themselves," he says. "This enables them to save substantially." Buyers have the option of providing their own foundation, or of having Laurino handle it for a price.

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