

Flower Power

When it comes to early spring planting, these plants are raring to go

BY KRIS WETHERBEE

Knowing which plants make good candidates for early spring planting is a major step to getting a jump on the season. But making sure that your new plant purchases have been properly “hardened off”—a term used to describe plants that have been gradually exposed to outdoor conditions—can make the difference between a plant that flourishes or one that goes into distress.



shady locations and moist, rich and well-drained soil.

Japanese Spirea (*Spiraea japonica*): Upright shrub growing 2 to 6 feet tall and wide, with pink to red blooms in summer to fall. Popular cultivars growing 2 to 3 feet tall include ‘Goldflame’ with red flowers and yellow-green foliage changing to reddish-orange

in fall; ‘Goldmound’ with pink flowers and golden foliage maturing to yellow-green; and ‘Shirobana’, with red buds opening to a bi-colored sensation of pink and white. Thrives in full sun to light shade in fertile, moderate to moist soil.

Moss Phlox (*Phlox subulata*): Late spring to early summer blooming perennial growing to 6 inches tall, with brilliant blooms that cover the ground in bright carpets of color in shades of pale to deep pink, lavender or white. Dark green foliage is evergreen to semi-evergreen with needlelike leaves. Grows best in full sun and average but well-drained soil with moderate moisture.

Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*): Daisy-like flowers appearing in summer in shades of pink to lavender and rose, followed by attractive autumn seedheads enjoyed by many birds. Flowering stems rise from 3 to 4 feet tall also make a wonderful fresh cut flower for arranging in a vase. Somewhat drought-tolerant once established. Grows best in full sun to light shade and well-drained, humus rich soil.

Rose (*Rosa spp.*): This classic flowering shrub—available as bareroot plants in early spring, or later, in containers—comes in a wide range of sizes, forms, and bloom color. There are hundreds of terrific varieties of groundcover, shrub, and vining roses from old-fashioned favorites to modern day cultivars. Redleaf rose (*Rosa glauca*) is a hardy shrub with arching dark purple-red stems and deep pink flowers set off by bluish gray foliage. Most roses grow best in a sunny to lightly shaded location with good air circulation and moderately fertile and moist, but well-drained soil. 🌱

Kris Wetherbee is a writer and gardener in Oregon.

GREAT PICKS

Most plants can go in the ground once the threat of a killing frost has passed, though bareroot trees and shrubs are best transplanted in late winter while they are still dormant. As a general rule, if it’s available at your local nursery or garden center it’s probably safe to plant. For some great picks for early spring planting, check out these eight hardy favorites.

Azalea (*Rhododendron spp.*): Long-lived, easy-to-grow evergreen and deciduous shrubs with large, fragrant spring blooms perfect for the partly shaded garden. Does best in a cool, moist organic soil.

Bee Balm (*Monarda didyma*): Long-blooming summer flowers ranging in color from red to mahogany and pink to lavender grow atop upright stems from 2 to 4 feet tall. Slightly hairy leaves smell somewhat of mint and basil, and when brewed as tea, make a tasty beverage. Best grown in full sun to light shade and moist, well-drained soil.

Hardy Geranium (*Geranium spp.*): Also known as cranesbill, this group of summer-blooming perennials are a standard in European gardens. This perpetual bloomer with colors in blue, pink, purple, magenta, bluish-rose, and white appreciates moist, well-drained soil in a sunny location with afternoon shade where summers are hot.

Hollyhock (*Alcea rosea*): Cottage garden favorite from the Mediterranean region with beautiful single, semidouble, or double flowers in summer in a wide range of colors. This self-sowing, short-lived perennial thrives in sunny to partially