

8-1-2001

## The Southwest Ohio Perennial Flower School- A "Perennial" Winner

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### Recommended Citation

Gao, G. (2001). The Southwest Ohio Perennial Flower School- A "Perennial" Winner. *The Journal of Extension*, 39(4), Article 25. <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol39/iss4/25>

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August 2001 // Volume 39 // Number 4 // Tools of the Trade // 4TOT5



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### Abstract

The Southwest Ohio Perennial Flower School (The Perennial School) is a successful 1-day seminar on plant selection, garden design, and garden maintenance of herbaceous perennial plants. The Perennial School has been offered each year since 1995 and has featured top local growers and sellers of perennial flowers as exhibitors since 1997. The Perennial School has been a "perennial" winner for 6 years and serves as a great model program for other agricultural and horticultural Extension Agents.

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### Introduction

Herbaceous perennials are a group of popular ornamental plants. Unlike annuals, perennials come up each spring after dying to the ground each fall. There has been a strong demand for information on selection, garden design, and maintenance of perennials from home gardeners, Master Gardeners, garden center employees, and landscapers.

The Southwest Ohio Perennial Flower School is a comprehensive 1-day seminar conducted annually to provide information on perennials to a diverse audience. This program captivated 74 attendees in 1995; 180 in 1996; 260 in 1997; 210 in 1998; 280 in 1999; and 200 in 2000. The Perennial School has also featured local commercial exhibitors each year since 1997.

### Targeted Audiences

The targeted audiences of the Perennial School has included home gardeners, Master Gardeners, flower growers, garden center employees, landscapers, garden designers, and Extension professionals. Nearly 40% of the Perennial School attendees have been home gardeners, while 20% have been Master Gardeners. Both home gardeners and Master Gardeners have come to the Perennial School to gain ideas on improving their home landscapes. Master Gardeners also receive advanced training credits for their recertification. Many garden centers, nurseries, and landscaping companies in the Greater Cincinnati Area have adopted this program as their employee-training program. A few Extension professionals have attended the program as well.

### Popular Topics

Program topics are divided into the following three groups:

- Plant selection,
- Garden design, and
- Garden maintenance.

Popular topics on plant selection have included:

- New and emerging perennials,
- Perennials for sunny and shady areas, and

- Reliable perennials for problem areas.

Topics on perennial garden design have been:

- Designing a four-season perennial garden,
- Successful perennial combinations,
- Designing herb gardens with interesting themes, and
- Gardening to attract hummingbirds and butterflies.

Information on garden maintenance has included:

- Maintaining perennial beds,
- A season in the perennial garden care,
- Fertilizing perennials in the home landscape,
- Identification and control of diseases in perennials, and
- Identification and control of insects in perennials.

### **Helpful Handouts**

Each year, the Perennial School attendees have been given a pocket folder containing helpful handouts. The handout materials have included color bulletins such as:

- "Perennial Plants for Ohio," available through the Ohio Nursery and Landscape Association;
- "Perennials For Outdoor Living," by the Perennial Plant Association; and
- Ohio State University Extension fact sheets and bulletins.

### **Program Evaluations**

The Perennial School has received excellent evaluations each year. In 1999, more than 98% of attendees said they would improve their garden design, plant selection, and maintenance of their perennial gardens as a result of the school. All of the commercial exhibitors have indicated they have expanded their customer base as a result of their participation.

In 1999, this program was presented as a poster presentation during the Annual Meeting and Professional Improvement Conference of the National Association of County Agricultural Agents in Omaha, Nebraska. About 60 Extension Agents picked up information on this Perennial School, and more than 20 Extension Agents from 16 states requested additional information.

### **Summary**

The Southwest Ohio Perennial Flower School has been a "perennial" winner each year since 1995. The Perennial School will continue to be offered each year and will feature new topics and informative speakers. This program serves as a great model program for other agricultural and horticultural Extension Agents.

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