

March Plant of the Month



Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*)

Rudbeckia gets its common name “Black-eyed Susan” from the dark brown center cone of the flower. In the language of flowers, the Black-eyed Susan represents ‘Justice’. They are native to northeast Ohio and the northeastern United States, zones 3-9. They attract bees, beneficial insects, birds and butterflies to your home garden. Best of all, they are deer resistant. They are drought tolerant once established. As ‘sun worshipers’ they put on their best show in full sun. They will tolerate partial sun, but the blooms will not be as prolific. The daisy like flower is a dazzling golden yellow and typically measure about 2”- 3” in diameter on 8” flower stems. Plants typically reach about 3’ in height and bloom from early summer through early autumn frost.

The species name *hirta* means “hairy” and refers to the hairy-fuzzy texture of the leaves. Water at soil level to avoid water on the leaves and to prevent fungal disease. They tend to spread both by seed and rhizomes so give them space. You can control spreading by deadheading spent flowers. You can choose to leave seed heads for the birds to enjoy and spread the golden joy of blooms the following season. They are considered a short-lived perennial so by leaving the seed heads on through winter you will encourage self-seeding and naturalize as a meadow.

Today there are many hybrids of the *Rudbeckia* genus that vary from annual to biennial and perennial. Flower colors range from shades of red, orange, and yellow. The Perennial Plant Association has named *Rudbeckia* ‘American Gold Rush’ the 2023 Perennial of the Year.

If you are growing Black-eyed Susans for ornamental purposes then pair them with companion plants that will enhance their natural beauty. Some of the best companion perennial plants include Russian Sage, Purple Coneflower, Fountaingrass, Yarrow and Daisies. Cosmos, Salvia and Zinnias are annuals that compliment Black-eyed Susans as well.

Indigenous people have used the roots as medicine to treat earaches, get rid of parasitic worms and treat snakebites.

If you are looking for a low maintenance – high impact, stunning mass planting, then plant some Black-eyed Susans this spring. Plant a meadow, fill a vase, and enjoy! You just might find that those fireflies of summers gone by, just may come back for a visit.

Plant of the Month is courtesy of the Bath Gamma Garden Club

Pam Reitz