



Reblooming is booming

Consumers are drawn to new annuals, perennials and shrubs offering easy, continuous interest

BY KYM POKORNY

WHEN MANY CONSUMERS approach a garden designer or visit a garden center, they know two things for sure: They want low maintenance, and they want color from spring till fall.

“I’m looking for successive bloom,” said Jenna Bayer, owner of **Jenna Bayer Garden Design** in Hillsboro, Oregon. “It’s all about right plant, right place, right purpose. It becomes a cadence, a rhythm you expect. When I design a garden, something is always going on. That’s what clients ask for.”

To meet that demand, breeders look for plants like Knock Out® roses or Endless Summer® hydrangeas, wildly popular introductions that brought reblooming plants into the public’s eye. Gardeners snatched them up when they saw the beautifully blooming plants at garden centers, in magazines, on social media or even in someone’s garden.

Once people learned how well the rebloomers perform, they went back for more — so did their friends, family, and neighbors.

Breeders took note and reblooming took on increased importance. If people were going to bite, breeders were going to deliver.

“Getting the most bloom and beauty out of a plant is obviously something we’ve always looked for,” said Justin Hancock, director of marketing for **Monrovia** (Dayton, Oregon). “But it’s safe to say in the last few years it’s more of a conscious decision rather than nice to have.”

Plenty of blooms

Monrovia hit the jackpot with their 2019 introduction of SunBelievable™ Brown Eyed Girl, a hybrid *Helianthus* that blooms generously from spring until first frost. An annual in USDA Hardiness Zones less than 10, it’s multi-branching and nicely mounded to 32 inches tall and 40 inches wide. Trials show SunBelievable putting on 1,000 flowers in a season. Nurseries report brisk sales once consumers see the mass of bright blooms.

At **Skagit Gardens** (Mount Vernon, Washington), rebloom- ➤

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Previous page: Endless Summer® BloomStruck® hydrangea. PHOTO COURTESY OF BAILEY

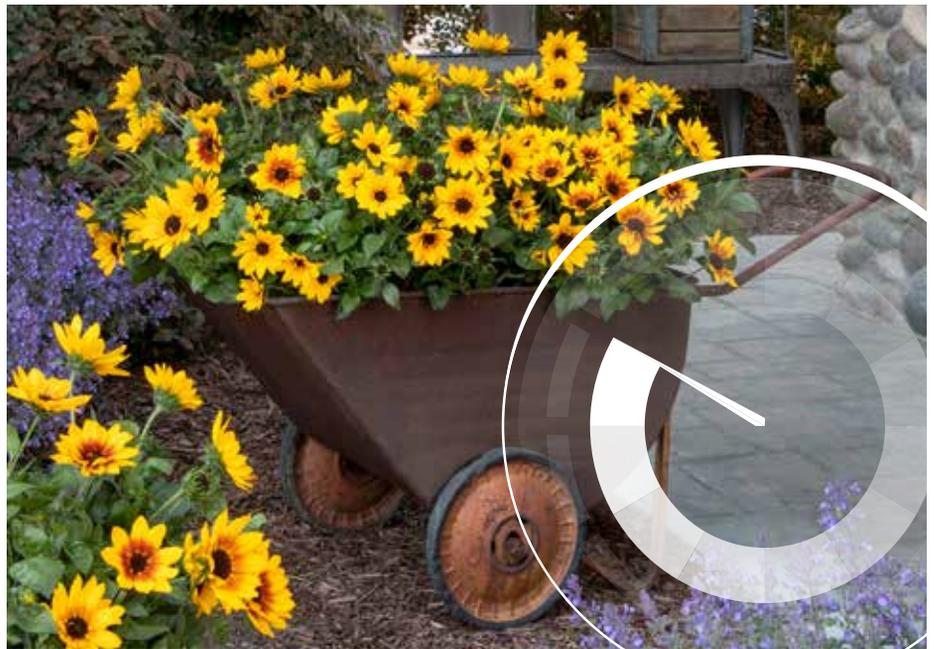
Top: SunBelievable™ Brown Eyed Girl Helianthus PHOTO COURTESY OF SKAGIT GARDENS

Bottom: Marigold Frch Strawberry Blonde. PHOTO COURTESY OF SKAGIT GARDENS

ing marigolds and snapdragons get a lot of attention, according to Crystal Cady, account manager at the nursery. *Monarda* 'Fireball' opens red and changes to bronze and then gold so that the plant multiple colors at the same time.

Marigold Frch Strawberry Blonde, another plant with multicolored blooms, shows off pompom flowers that open yellow-pink and change to plum. Neither are tasty to deer, and they repel pesky garden insects to boot. They have the added benefit of drought tolerance, and if deadheaded, they'll keep right on blooming through fall.

Cady also recommends the Twinny™ series of compact snapdragons, which bloom profusely in early spring. Deadheaded, they'll make another appearance when weather cools down in fall when other plants get lazy. Twinny Peach,



which garnered an All-America Selections award, is the first double snapdragon and the color is a unique combination of peach, yellow and light orange.

Skagit doesn't ignore perennials. Cady points to the *Delosperma cooperi* 'Jewel of the Desert', very hardy, succulents that don't quit blooming from spring through fall. As a drought-tolerant ground cover, it's tough to beat. Flowers appear in shades of pink, yellow, garnet and some showy bi-colors.

Still a Knock Out

Twenty years ago, Star® Roses & Plants introduced the world to the first Knock Out rose, a red hybrid between a shrub rose and a flori-

bunda that blooms so profusely the foliage is almost invisible. Better yet, Knock Out roses bloom continuously rather than intermittently like other roses, and they are self-cleaning, so no deadheading is needed.

Other roses joined the series, most recently the first dwarf called Petite. Hard as nails, the Knock Out series takes neglect with aplomb, is drought tolerant, disease resistant and fragrant. What more could a consumer want? Obviously nothing, because the Knock Out roses are some of the country's best sellers.

Part of what drives sales is the constant flowering of Knock Outs, which are never out of bloom. People can always see what they get when they plant one in the garden.

"Not only does reblooming provide extended color in the garden without trimming or deadheading, it extends the sales period," said Kristen Pullen, woody ornamental product manager at Star Roses & Plants. ➤

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Reblooming is booming

Top: Invicibelle® Spirit II hydrangea. PHOTO COURTESY OF SPRING MEADOW NURSERY

Bottom: Oso Easy® rose. PHOTO COURTESY OF SPRING MEADOW NURSERY



& Plants. “People are attracted to blooms at the nursery and if the reblooming time is longer, people are more likely to pick it up.”

Newer to the scene is the Easy Elegance® series, which has 24 varieties, according Natalia Hamill, brand and business development manager for **Bailey** (St. Paul, Minnesota).

Just as the name suggests, these roses are about as carefree as they could be. All of them are own root, disease resistant and most are self-cleaning.

Even newer is the Oso Easy® line. And they are oh so easy to care for and give abundant blooms carried above the foliage. Like Easy Elegance, Oso Easy roses are disease resistant and heavy



bloomers all season without deadheading. Pruning is optional for this landscape rose that gets 3 to 4 feet tall and wide.

Bred to bloom

When asked what species Bailey concentrates on for reblooming, Hamill laughed when she said “anything that blooms.” That might be an exaggeration, but the list is long and includes *Lagerstromia*, lilac, *Vitex*, rose, hydrangea and gardenia.

But nothing says Bailey as much as

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Endless Summer hydrangeas.

When walking through Bailey's planting fields one day, plantsman Mike Dirr noticed something he'd never seen before – a *Hydrangea macrophylla* that was blooming on old and new growth. Bailey knew they had something special, and they were right. Breeding began to combine the continuous blooming trait with other desirable characteristics like disease resistance, better hardiness and tougher stems.

In 2004, Endless Summer was introduced. It took off and is now the world's best-selling hydrangea, according to Hamill. Since then, Bailey has introduced four more plants in the series, including heavy-selling BloomStruck®, a popular dark purple and blue hydrangea and Summer Crush®, a color breakthrough of raspberry red flowers that's the latest to come to market.

Coming in 2021 is another rebloomer from the Proven Winners Invincibelle® series of *Hydrangea arborescens* or smooth hydrangea bred by Tom Ranney. Invincibelle Garnetta, a compact 3 feet tall and wide, offers rosy pink mophead-type flowers on strong stems that don't flop under the weight of heavy blooms.

Another in the series is Invincibelle Spirit II, a bright pink hydrangea introduced 10 years ago. Spring Meadow donates \$1 for every plant sold to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation; so far \$1 million has been raised.

"It's a special hydrangea and we wanted to do something special," said Natalie Carmoli, a spokesperson for Spring Meadow Nursery and Proven Winners® Color Choice® Shrubs. "It's a way for the industry to come together and make a difference."

Hydrangeas also get top billing in the breeding program of Spring Meadow Nursery and Proven Winners, which came up with the best sellers *Hydrangea paniculata* 'Limelight' and *H. arborescens* Incrediball®, said Natalie Carmoli, public relations and marketing specialist.

Bred by Spring Meadow's Tim Wood, Incrediball's flowers are almost as big as a basketball and stems grow strong to hold up those monster blooms. At 48 to 60 inches tall and wide, Incrediball holds up well >>

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Top: *Hydrangea arborescens* Incrediball®. PHOTO COURTESY OF SPRING MEADOW NURSERY

Bottom: *Hydrangea paniculata* 'Limelight'. PHOTO COURTESY OF PROVEN WINNERS

as a specimen plant or as a dramatic border. A second variety, Incrediball Blush, was introduced and showed flowers as big as its sister in an unusual light silvery pink.

Coming up is Cancan, an addition to the Let's Dance™ series of mostly mophead hydrangeas. The new kid on the block is a lacecap with strawberry pink or violet flowers, depending on soil pH. It has the unique ability to create flower buds along the entire length of the stems instead of only at the top like other big-leaf hydrangeas, which means that even if winter kills back a portion of the plant, there will be flower buds to open in early summer.

"It's a strong bloomer and also reblooms faster so blooms come early for short season areas," Carmolli said. "It gives people success in cold climate gardening."

Educating the public

While breeders continue the quest for more rebloomers, the public, especially beginning gardeners, don't necessarily know what reblooming means, but they love them just the same, said Katie Dubow, owner of trend-watching Garden Media Group (Kennett Square, Pennsylvania) who also sells plants on the



QVC shopping network.

"When I talk about reblooming plants," she said, "the phones light up. When they hear 'reblooming,' it makes it sound easier, like a 30-minute Rachael Ray dinner. They also think of it as a better investment. One plant will do double duty."

Dubow warns, though, not to focus only on rebloomers or it could denigrate other stalwarts that give their all in one month. Hancock of Monrovia agrees.

"There's a fine line you walk between marketing rebloomers and other great plants that aren't," he said. "Every plant has its place and reblooming is not the only attribute that's important to gardeners. Just because they don't rebloom doesn't mean people are going to quit buying peonies."

They also wouldn't quit buying lilacs,

but wouldn't they be happy if there was a reblooming variety? Now there is. Lilac Bloomerang® (*Syringa* × *Penda*) is the result of dedicated breeding by Tim Wood of Spring Meadow. The original Bloomerang Purple flowers in spring, takes a break and comes back to bloom mid-summer through fall. A bit smaller than other lilacs, the Bloomerang series boasts a rounded habit that only gets 48 to 60 inches tall, perfect for today's smaller gardens.

Portable reblooming

"We're looking for smaller versions of rebloomers; things that look good in pots on a porch," Carmolli said. "That's of great interest."

Gardenias are of great interest, as well. Star Roses and Plants and Spring Meadow are both focused on reblooming gardenias. The best from Spring Meadow is a gardenia named Double Mint, a variety that puts on double, 2-inch flowers at the end of May and because it sets buds and flowers on new wood, there's rebloom for the rest of the season.

The top reblooming gardenia in the Star Roses collection is *Gardenia jasminoides* 'Buttons', a compact 1½- to 2-foot tall and wide plant that prefers to grow in a pot rather than the ground. With intensely fragrant, semi-double flowers, 'Buttons' is the perfect candidate for an outdoor living space where the scent will waft through the air to be enjoyed by anyone sitting outside. Both gardenias are hardy to Zone 7.

Azaleas are another popular plant to breed for the reblooming trait. Star Roses, Spring Meadow and Monrovia compete for market share with the Bloomathon® series coming from Bailey, Double Shot® from Monrovia and FlorAmore®



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Lilac Bloomerang® (*Syringa* × 'Penda'). PHOTO COURTESY OF SPRING MEADOW NURSERY



from Star Roses. FlorAmore comes in four colors — red, hot pink, medium pink and lavender — and a fifth is about to make its debut. Double Shot, a compact azalea for small yards, has four colors, grape, salmon, watermelon and lavender. With double, fluffy flowers, Bloomathon is another compact plant in colors ranging from pink to red to white to lavender.

With consumers demanding low-maintenance plants that give pleasure from spring till fall, breeding for reblooming eye-candy plants continues at a quick pace.

“Breeding for reblooming is very important,” Carmolli said. “One of the most important things to consumers is bloom, and because we grow and sell ornamental plants, that’s what we need to focus on. If you want to resonate with people, reblooming plants are the way to go.” ©

Kym Pokorny is a garden writer with more than 20 years of experience writing for The Oregonian (Portland, Oregon) and other publications. She is currently a communications specialist with Oregon State University Extension Service. Kym can be reached at kym.pokorny@oregonstate.edu.

Editor’s note: A previous version of this article misattributed the Invincibelle line of hydrangeas to an incorrect nursery. They are introduced by Spring Meadow Nursery and are part of the Proven Winners® Color Choice® line of shrubs. Spring Meadow donates \$1 for each Spirit II hydrangea sold to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation — the beneficiary was misstated in the prior version of this article. Finally, the article misstated the grower of the Double Mint gardenia. It is grown by Bailey and is part of the First Editions® line. We apologize for the errors.

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