



Black-eyed Susan...  
who is she?

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(*Rudbeckia hirta* vs. *Rudbeckia fulgida*)

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- Over the course of the season, we get many orders for “Black-eyed Susan”. So, is that a problem? And why?
  - If you’ve ever perused our catalog, you may have noticed that every plant has a specific common name. We use many references to assign a common name to each individual variety we offer.
  - Wisflora.com is the authority for not only what is and is not native to Wisconsin, but also what is the preferred name, both botanical and common, for any plant native to Wisconsin. This site is a collaborative effort between the herbaria of the UW-Madison (WIS) and the UW-Steven's Point (UWSP), along with most of the other herbaria located in the state of Wisconsin. It contains information on each of the more than 2600 vascular plant species that occur in Wisconsin, including photos, distribution maps, specimen records, and more.
  - According to Wisflora.com, the common name of Black-eyed Susan is a specific member of the Rudbeckia family, namely *Rudbeckia hirta*.





- Knowing that many folks in horticulture tend to refer to anything with yellow flowers and a dark eye as “Black-eyed Susan”, and being good customer service folks, we now have to drill down and ask some questions.
- Sometimes our customer is looking for one of the *Rudbeckia fulgida* varieties. We’ll cover that in more detail with a different presentation.
- Sometimes it is one of the *Rudbeckia hirta* varieties. This then triggers a conversation with the designer, project manager or order specialist.
- If during this conversation it is determined that *Rudbeckia hirta* is being used in the appropriate way, all is well. At other times, we will encourage substituting *Rudbeckia fulgida* varieties.

# Here's why....

- All Rudbeckia **hirta** are biennial.
- The straight species, Rudbeckia hirta, has its place in prairies and other native restoration projects, where it provides early color and soil stabilization.
- Other Rudbeckia hirta varieties such as Cherokee Sunset, Cherry Brandy, Goldilocks, Indian Summer, Irish Eyes, Prairie Sun and the like, are used successfully in seasonal containers and for the home garden.
- However, landscape beds do not encourage reseeding and so are not good candidates for Rudbeckia hirta to thrive.



- When that happens, we suggest using a perennial Rudbeckia such as Rudbeckia fulgida speciosa and Summer Blaze, Rudbeckia fulgida deamii, Early Bird Gold, Viette's Little Suzy, American Gold Rush and Glitter's Like Gold as subs.
- All are perennial and highly resistant to Septoria leaf spot.





## So, what is a Biennial?

No, it is not a plant that blooms every other year.

- In between annuals (plants that flower and die within one season) and perennials (plants that live longer than two years) is another plant category known as biennials.
- Biennials are short-lived plants that usually take two growing seasons to complete their life cycle.



## What are Some Commonly Grown Biennials?

- Many popular flowers are biennial, although it often goes without notice because the plants bought at nurseries or greenhouses are usually in their second year and ready to flower.
- Biennials, if left to self-sow, will produce foliage in their first season, but do not produce flowers until it is fully mature in its second season.
- With some biennials, if they set seed early enough in the season, you may get flowers in their first growing season. Most, though, will not set seed until the fall and/or germinate until the spring. In that case, they will skip a year of blooming between the first year when you planted the original plants and the third year when the new seedlings are ready to flower. Once you've had plants in the garden for a couple of years, there will be a steady supply of new seedlings always coming in.



## What are Some Commonly Grown Biennials?

Be aware the genera may be available with different species and varieties, some of which are annual, biennial or perennial. Some examples are:

- Rudbeckia – Obviously, we've just been discussing some of their biennial and perennial species. There are also new hybrid genetics namely the Sunbeckia's and others, that are definitely annual here as they are only hardy to zone 7.
- Alcea – Hollyhocks. *Alcea rugosa* is a true perennial. *Alcea rosea* Halo series is first year flowering and short-lived. *A. rosea* Double Mix, Nigra and Simplex and others are Biennial.
- Campanula – Bellflower. We offer several of the perennial species. *Campanula medium* is biennial. *Campanula americana* can act as an annual or biennial and there are others.
- Digitalis – Foxglove. Perennials include *D. lutea*, *D. thapsii* Spanish Peaks, and the Arctic Fox series, which is also first year flowering. Biennials are *P. d.* Candy Mountain, Temple Bells (short lived), Excelsior Hybrids and the Camelot and Dalmatian series are also 1<sup>st</sup> year flowering. There is only one annual that we are aware of – *Digitalis Foxy*. *Digiplexis* is a cross between *Digitalis purpurea* and *Isoplexis canariensis* and is usually not hardy in zone 4-5.
- Papaver – Poppy. *Papaver orientale* varieties are perennial. Biennial Poppies are *P. nudicaule* and *P. alpinum*. Annual poppies are *P. somniferum* and *P. rhoeas*





# What are Some Commonly Grown Biennials?

Other popular biennial flowers include:

- Honesty (*Lunaria annua*)
- Sweet William (*Dianthus barbatus*)
- Forget-me-Not (*Myosotis sylvatica*)
- Pansy (*Viola wittrockiana*)
- Stock (*Matthiola incarnata*)
- Wallflower (*Erysium cherii*)





We hope this helps to understand biennials  
(and Black-eyed Susan)  
a little better!

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Thank you!

Questions? Comments?  
Please contact us!

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