

Ailsa Francis: Garden nurseries offer broad selection, inspiration for green thumbs

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The Rideau Woodland Ramble near Kemptville offers range of perennials and shrubs. Pat McGrath / Ottawa Citizen

If you only ever bought your plants from the home-improvement and grocery stores, you'd think that by the end of July, the gardening season was over. Kaput. Finito.

Newsflash: When the last dregs of bruised hosta and crispy-leafed astilbe are sitting on the rapidly shrinking metal shelving of the big-box stores, the independently owned plant nurseries are in their glory.

These family-owned nurseries are where you'll find plants being lovingly cared for – there might not be as many as there were in May, but there is enough to make your choice difficult. These nurseries are worth a visit not simply because of the plants, but because they are a destination unto themselves.

If you are tired of seeing the ubiquitous Stella d'Oro daylily in your nightmares, then go to Whitehouse Perennials just outside of Almonte and choose from their vast selection. Maybe Angel Fire is for you with its fragrant ruby red petals, green throat and velvety texture. Or try Blackthorne, a standout bi-colour daylily combining creamy yellow and wine purple with a chartreuse throat.

In July and early August, you'll find more than 1,000 varieties of daylilies growing in the fields at this nursery run by Suzanne Patry and Bruce Trites. But lest you think this couple is satisfied with just growing daylilies, you'll be happy to know that they have an extensive catalogue of perennials as well. When you visit, you'll also be thrilled by mature gardens where plants are being grown in their ideal environment — the best lesson for timid or beginner gardeners.



Kiwi Gardens in Perth

At Kiwi Gardens on the other side of Perth, Paul Loiselles oversees more than 1,000 perennials at his country plant nursery adjacent to his home. Ferns, grasses, hosta, succulents, vines and woody plants (that means shrubs and trees), as well as a vast selection of perennials, are all set out waiting to be given their permanent home.

A visit to Kiwi Gardens is not just about picking plants, but about strolling through their gardens as well: a permanent sculpture garden, a woodland walk, raised hillside plantings and an entrance rock garden await. There are patios, rock walls and benches on which to rest, and knowledgeable plant people there to answer your nagging gardening questions. That striking plant – *Angelica gigas* – I saw at Chanticleer Garden near Philadelphia is here, as well as *Astilbe Color Flash*, a woodland perennial with ever-changing (and sun-tolerant) foliage shifting from burgundy-purple to orange, red and bronze.



Rideau Woodland Ramble Nursery

Just past Kemptville, you'll find the spectacular Rideau Woodland Ramble, which has been named Canadian Garden Centre Destination of the Year by the Canadian Garden Council. Since 2000, Rob Caron and Dave Dunn have created an ever-growing plant nursery with a wide and often unusual selection of trees, evergreens, shrubs, vines, roses and perennials. But more than this, their expansive property is a veritable arboretum full of select evergreens (dwarf, weeping, golden or miniature specimens) shade trees (Kentucky Coffee tree, tulip tree or even Stewartia), shrubs and woodland perennials. It is well worth a visit in every season

If you go

Whitehouse Perennials: Open Monday to Saturday, 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. until Sept. 30 (www.whitehouseperennials.com)

Kiwi Gardens: Open seven days a week, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. until mid-September (www.kiwigardens.ca)

Rideau Woodland Ramble: Open 7 days a week, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. until November (www.rideauwoodlandramble.com)

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