

Garden Sages/Marge Hols

Belles of the Border

A favorite family outing when I was growing up was a stroll through the gardens at Stanley Park in Westfield, Massachusetts. The park featured a carillon tower, giant copper beeches and long perennial borders that made even experienced gardeners like my mother and grandmother green with envy.

My favorite flowers were foxgloves and Canterbury bells, planted in great drifts among the borders. Both produced colorful bells cascading down tall stalks in much the way I pictured the carillon bells hanging in their tower.

Although dormant for years this memory returned as I planted my first garden here in Minnesota: A perennial garden must have foxgloves and Canterbury bells in abundance. Their tall columns of showy, bell-shaped flowers supply vertical accents that contrast with rounded forms, such as lady's mantle, coralbells and hardy geranium.

Both of these garden belles are quite tolerant of shade so long as they receive some morning sun. But they're underused in our gardens. Perhaps it's because Canterbury bells, (often called cup-and-saucer) and some foxgloves are biennials, meaning they live only two years. Plants grow basal leaves one year, and flower and set seed the next.

Canterbury bells (*Campanula medium*) are usually sold in a mix of purple, rose, white and pink. I look for first-year plants to tuck into the border for next year's bloom. You could also start them from seed this spring.



Digitalis purpurea 'Foxy'

Not all foxgloves (*Digitalis species*) are created equal. Two lovely pale yellow ones are true perennials. *D. grandiflora* (sometimes sold as *D. ambigua*) is a mainstay of my woodland garden, its bells performing from June into August. *D. lutea* is a cousin with petite bells.

Nurseries also sell the common biennial, *Digitalis purpurea*, and the perennial strawberry foxglove, *D. mertonensis*. But they often die over winter, so I've switched to growing as annuals varieties that bloom the first year from seed.

Digitalis purpurea 'Foxy' comes in a pastel mix and 'Camelot' is available in individual colors. I start seeds in early March and plant seedlings in my garden in mid May. You may find seedlings at some nurseries. Beginning in late July and continuing until frost, 'Foxy' and 'Camelot' awaken memories and add a touch of England to my garden.