

Gardening in Small Spaces

Jennifer L. Baker

Gardening in small spaces can often be more of a challenge than large expanses as even the most minute details are noticed. Gazing out over the horizon at a garden comprising an acre or two or 100, your attention is distracted from the occasional deer or rabbit-browsed aster, mildewed monarda or dormant shooting star by the healthy blooms of cupplant, coneflowers and blazingstars. When I am designing a small space, say less than 50 square feet or so, I like to use plants that are relatively "well behaved". I steer clear of the rapidly spreading rhizomatous plants such as wild golden glow (*Rudbeckia laciniata*) or frost aster (*Aster pilosus*) or aggressive species that eventually tend to dominate such as ox-eye sunflower (*Heliopsis helianthoides*). Instead, I use wildflowers that supply their above ground growth with water and nutrients through tap roots, corms or very slow spreading rhizomes. I also stick with native grasses or sedges that are clump forming instead of spreading, which keeps the garden maintenance to a minimum. One of my favorite combinations, used by a client with a small rectangular bed lining her back deck, is prairie smoke (*Geum triflorum*) and cream false indigo (*Baptisia leucophaea*) for spring and early summer color combined with butterflyweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) and Sullivant's milkweed (*Asclepias sullivantii*) for summer followed by meadow blazingstar (*Liatris ligulistylus*) and sky blue aster (*Aster azureus*) for late summer and fall interest. Prairie dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*) was added between the flowers for support as well as color through the fall and winter.