

Flowering Annuals

General:

Annuals give maximum garden color and beauty, provide cut flowers, and allow the gardener lots of creativity. They bloom continuously and are, as a rule, carefree plants. To get the most from your annuals, here are a few guidelines.

Selection:

Pick the right plant for your garden spot - sunny, shady, dry, wet, for containers, tall or short. By planting your annuals in the location best suited to them, you'll be rewarded with profuse bloom and healthy plants. Look for strong, stocky plants - avoid buying a marginal looking plant simply because it has a flower on it. Plants should be a healthy bright green and not be wilted or spindly.

Planting:

Soil types play an important part in the success of your gardens. Annuals grow quickly, and most appreciate the addition of organic matter to the soil - peat moss, cow manure, and compost - to help loosen soil and hold moisture during hot, dry summers. When digging your bed, loosen the soil to at least a depth of 8-12 inches. If spot-planting annuals- popping them in around the mailbox or light post, try to avoid the temptation to make a hole just big enough to squeeze the plant in. By taking the time to loosen the soil, your plants will grow and bloom much more quickly. Set your plant at the same depth it was growing in its container - planting too deep can rot the plant. Firm soil around the roots, and water thoroughly to eliminate air pockets.

Fertilizer:

Annuals need additional food since they grow so quickly. You can add a granular fertilizer at the time of planting such as 5-10-10, or top dress the beds with a slow release pellet like Osmocote. The advantage with slow release is that one fertilizing takes care of the season. If you water your beds or containers regularly, a water soluble powder such as Peter's 20-20-20 gives good results. The important thing is to fertilize consistently - follow directions on your fertilizer package.

Mulching:

If the weather is hot and dry, mulch applied to the top of the soil will help your gardens hold moisture and keep blooming. You can use bark, straw, well-dried grass clippings, or cocoa bean shells. Avoid peat moss, as it forms a water repellent barrier if allowed to sun-dry. Also avoid wet grass - it will mold and cause disease problems. Never use tan bark as it can burn tender annuals.

Maintenance:

Once planted, annuals are remarkably care-free. Removal of old flowers and seed pods allows the plants to concentrate on producing more flowers. Weeding reduces competition for food and water. If plants such as grandiflora petunias get leggy, pinching them back several inches will cause them to branch out and grow full. Watch for the occasional insect infestation (aphids being the most common). Water thoroughly once a week in dry weather. Be sure to soak the root zones. By only wetting the tip of the soil, it causes plants to form shallow roots that dry out and die.