
S·T·A·B·L·E·S Info Sheet

Planting Annuals

For many gardeners, annuals are a go-to solution for many garden needs. Annual flowers are a quick way to fill empty spots in flowerbeds. A mix of annual plants can offer a colorful display for window boxes and planters. There are dozens of annuals that do well in sun/shade situations, different soil conditions with many color options.

Annual plants have many advantages:

- Many flower from early in the season until they die in the fall, compared with perennial plants which have a comparatively short bloom time.
- Whether you grow purchased plants or start from seed, annuals are relatively inexpensive to grow. Many are easy to grow if you provide the right site and soil preparation.
- They are temporary. You can experiment with a wide range of colors, textures, and forms. If you don't like the results, you can do things differently next year.
- Annuals are great for filling in bare spaces in perennial beds. When spring bulbs die back, for example, you can fill the void with annuals. Annuals also provide season-long interest in pots and containers.
- Annuals are versatile. They range in size from bedding plants less than a foot tall to giants that grow 8 feet or more. Annual vines can climb 10 feet or more on trellises or other structures or they can ramble that distance along the ground. Many annuals perform best in direct sun and warm weather. Others prefer shade and/or cool. Some tolerate light frosts while others die at the mere hint of a freeze. Blossoms run the entire spectrum of the rainbow. Some annuals are grown for their interesting foliage colors or textures.

Planting Options

Some annuals, such as snapdragons and stock, will tolerate frosts. These are called hardy annuals. But freezing temperatures kill most of the others. These are called tender annuals. Half-hardy annuals will tolerate mild frost.

If you are growing tender annuals, don't be in a rush to plant. Since many tender annuals only thrive in warm soils and air temperatures, planting them too early only stresses the plants. In our area, even though the last frost date is mid April, the soil is

still too cold to plant and our night temperatures too cold. Mid May is the ideal time for planting.

Purchased plants

The easiest way to get started with annuals is to buy greenhouse-raised seedlings at garden centers. Usually, the plants are more robust and healthier than those we start from seed on our windowsills. They transplant easily and bloom early. Your choice of what to grow, however, is limited by what's popular. If you want to grow anything out of the ordinary, come and see us here at Stables Garden Center. We have a great selection of plants.

Look for healthy plants, but remember that what you are really buying is the roots. A damaged leaf or dying flower is not necessarily a sign that the plant is diseased. Look instead for a strong root system that fills out the pot or cell, but at the same time isn't overly root-bound.

Annuals that are in flower when you purchase them aren't necessarily better than those that aren't. It helps buyers know what the flowers look like, but it could also be a sign that the plants are over-mature and the roots may be pot-bound. If there is no picture or description on the label of a flowerless plant, ask the garden center staff for more information.

Caring for Annuals

Mulching

Most annuals benefit from applications of organic mulches to retain moisture in the soil and smother weeds. Grass clippings, shredded leaves or bark, compost, and other organic materials also improve the soil as they break down.

Watering

While some annuals are drought-tolerant, most need plenty of water. If the soil dries out due to lack of rain, it's important to thoroughly soak the soil when you water, not just wet the surface. It's also important to keep the foliage and flowers as dry as possible to prevent disease. Soaker hoses and drip irrigation do this best. If you use sprinklers, run them in the morning so that the plants dry quickly in the sun. Watering individual plants by hand takes patience to supply enough water to thoroughly soak the soil. Deep watering less often is better than light watering every day.

Pinching

Some annuals respond well to pinching -- removing the growing tips by pinching off the small, developing leaves at the ends of stems. This forces more lateral growth, making the plant bushier and shorter.

Staking

Some tall annuals tend to fall over, especially when they are heavy with flowers. To keep them upright, you can locate them so other plants help support them, or back them up against a fence or other structure and fasten them with twine. Another alternative is to insert stakes of wood, bamboo, or other unobtrusive material in the soil adjacent to the plants while they are still small and, as they grow, fasten the plants to the stake. Other commercial products are available to support plants.

Deadheading

Many annuals benefit from removing flowers once they begin to fade. A weekly walk through the garden deadheading spent blooms will keep many annuals flowering longer and more profusely. Some will stop blooming and die if not deadheaded. A few need to be cut back severely in midseason to encourage a new flush of growth and flowering in late summer and fall. Some annuals readily self-seed. If you want to prevent them from doing so, you need to deadhead faithfully. A few annuals, such as begonias, do not benefit from deadheading.

Fertilizing

Most annuals need fertile, well-drained soil for healthy growth. That's why it's important to incorporate organic matter when preparing beds. Use a fertilizer regularly, following package instructions. Liquid food works quickly and can be used every few weeks. Granular food stays in the soil longer and don't have to be used as often.

Sources: <http://www.cornell.edu/search/>

<http://www.bhg.com/gardening/flowers/annuals/planting-annuals/>