

How do I plant and maintain annual flowers?

Annuals are colorful flowers that are available seasonally. Varieties include Pansies (very early), Petunias, Salvia, Impatiens, Geraniums, Begonias, Marigold, Snapdragons, plus many more. Most varieties come in a rainbow of colors and usually become available in the beginning of May. If you are not sure of the right time to plant, Mother's Day is a good guide. Rarely do temperatures drop far enough after Mother's Day to do any damage to your annuals.

Planting any flowers should begin with the plant selection. Most annuals like a particular exposure. For example, Impatiens don't tolerate full, hot sun and dry soil, while Petunias love full sun. Be sure to observe the area you will be planting, looking at the presence and duration of sun or shade. When selecting your annuals, also consider the potential size of each plant at its maturity. Usually, 6" to 12" of space between each plant should allow sufficient room for the plant to grow. Always allow at least 6" from the edge of a bed as to avoid growing over the lawn where mower and edger damage are possible.

We next should focus on the soil. Most annuals require rich, loamy soil with very good drainage. If you don't have very good soil where you are thinking of planting, we recommend that you amend it by mixing in peat moss or replace it with topsoil.

Drainage is also very important to a healthy annual garden, because water can be a flower's best friend or its worst enemy. Too little water and annuals will quickly perish; too much and they will "drown." If the area you are planting in tends to have "puddling," or water sits there after a rain or watering for an extended period of time, then you have poor drainage and will need to correct the problem. Sometimes simply raising the bed by adding soil can make the correction.

Supplemental watering should be done regularly. Again, different varieties have different requirements. Most come with their particulars on the label, or you can ask your local supplier. Flowers that prefer "hot and dry" will still require water. For these plants, we recommend allowing the area to dry completely, wait one or two days, then add moisture - Do NOT keep the ground saturated. Flowers that prefer moist soil will require daily watering, especially during the hottest summer months. If wilting occurs on the plants, it may be time to water. If you see wilting and have watered consistently, you may be watering too much.

Certain varieties, such as Petunias and Marigolds, can be "dead-headed" to enhance flowering. After the flower is spent, just snap it off and another flower will replace it. You can also pinch back Petunias and certain other varieties when they become "leggy" so they refurbish themselves and grow fuller. Just shorten a third of each of their stems.

Annuals can be planted almost anywhere you feel the need for more color.

There is really no right or wrong spot. They can be planted in pots to add color to a deck or patio, window boxes, or in the bed areas. They don't have to be planted deep - only as deep as the root pack they come with. When you take the plant out of the container and see the roots wound tightly in a mass, this means it is "root bound." Just cut a criss-cross in the bottom and feather the roots apart before planting. Right after planting, they should be watered in and fed with a flower fertilizer, available at your local supplier.

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