



A diving platform lined with marigolds and tubs of flowers floats in front of a flower-laden boathouse on Canandaigua Lake in New York.

'WILD' FLOWERS

Planting flowers doesn't have to be boring. Creativity and color can liven up any landscape.

by Ann Reilly, *Bedding Plants Inc.*

Stubborn traditionalists will plant flowering annuals in beds or borders, as edgings or mass plantings. Those a little more adventuresome will spot planters along walkways, on the porch of the clubhouse, as barriers in the parking lot.

But those who really want to have fun with flowers will let their imaginations run wild and plant annuals into anything that will hold media, plants and water. Creativity will show up in the planting of logos and colorful geometric designs.

Theme parks across the country are filled with animals and fairy-tale figures made from flowers. But you don't need to be a theme park to benefit from this type of planting. Americans love color...they love the unusual.

Wherever the public gathers, they

love to see something unique, something different. So whether you're in charge of a park, shopping center, restaurant, hotel or commercial building, if you want to make a positive impression on the public, have fun with flowers.

On Canandaigua Lake in upper New York state, a diving platform lined with marigolds and tubs of flowers floats anchored in front of a flower-laden boathouse. The containers are PVC, and the media is an inorganic one that drains water quickly so the plants cannot be over-watered.

This particular planting is made of "Living Wall Gardens;" you can buy these pre-made modules or make them yourselves.

All the plants need is occasional feeding.

The Floating Gardens of Xochimilco in Mexico City may not be your goal by a long shot, but how about a float or two of flowers to attract interest in your pond or lake?

Containing color

Container gardening has been popular for centuries. Did you ever think about having fun with unusual containers?

At Buchardt Gardens in Victoria, B.C., annuals flow over the sides of an old rail car settled in a valley where it can be viewed from above. Floral managers have taken the whiskey barrel concept further and planted gardens into inner tubes and sawed-off garbage cans. Discarded drainage pipes work perfectly as planters, too.

Old Bethpage Historical Restoration planted a two-century-old children's wagon with flowers popular at the time. I've seen plantings in old work shoes, and, even in discarded toilets (an appropriate spot for the variety Royal Flush). As long as it works, use it!

PVC pipe has risen in popularity as a container over the last few years. It can be cut to length, stood on end, and provided with a base to keep it stable. It is then drilled with holes all around

and filled with young seedlings. It will not take long for the plants to grow and fill in and the entire planter to become a tower of flowers.

Soil-less media are used in the container with extra gravel at the bottom for weight and to ensure even drainage. Be sure drainage holes at the bottom are sufficient to prevent water-logging.

PVC pipe of larger diameter can also be laid on its side and an opening cut into the top for a planting. Drainage holes should also be cut into the bottom and a bracing system (which could be bricks on either side) set in place to prevent rolling.

Besides the container itself, it's where you put it that can be appealing and fun.

At Rockefeller Center in New York, a restaurant is set up in summer on the ice skating rink. Geraniums are planted on the roof of the restaurant where they can be enjoyed from street level.

In Kalamazoo, parking meters are camouflaged with containers on each side (perhaps a bit unfair to the unknowing parker). Bathtubs filled with flowers sit in front of restaurant windows from Brooklyn, N.Y. to New Orleans, La.

Empty tree stump? Don't remove it; fill it with flowers! Want a carpet of color on the side of a patio, but can't find a low, flat planter? Set plants directly into a bag of potting media, water, and watch them grow.

When you can't find just the right thing, make it yourself. This is especially useful in creating animals and other topiary forms or in making vertical gardens.

Forms can be created, with wood if necessary as an interior support, and molded to shape with chicken or tur-



Annuals flow out of a planter at Buchardt Gardens in Victoria, B.C.

key wire. Fill the form with soil-less media and push the plants into place through the holes in the wire. Vertical gardens are especially useful in areas where space is limited, but a mass of color is desired.

The recommended medium for any type of container planting is a soil-less mixture of 50 percent organic material, such as peat moss, and 50 percent inorganic material, such as perlite or vermiculite. Some floral managers substitute compost, leaf mold or fine bark chips, if available, for peat moss. Sharp builders' sand can be used instead of perlite or vermiculite; the good news (and the bad) is that sand is much heavier.

This would make the use of sand undesirable in hanging baskets or in large containers that would need to be moved from time to time. However, for small containers that are in a spot where wind might blow them over, the addition of sand would stabilize them.

Care of container plantings is relatively easy and low in maintenance requirements. You can work with

your local greenhouse or bedding plant supplier to have mature plants ready to burst into color at proper planting time, which would be around the last frost date in your area.

Carefully caring

After filling the container with the potting medium almost to the top, simply transfer the flowering annuals into the container, planting them at the same depth at which they grew in the pack or flat.

Since containers are most effective when they create a mass of color, it would be best to overplant them slightly—but without crowding. Water after planting and watch them grow!

Once every week or two weeks, include a soluble fertilizer when you water, following label directions. It is better to feed once a week at one-fourth strength than once a month at full strength to achieve more even growth. If light hits the container unevenly, rotating it a quarter turn every week or so will also help to keep growth even. If the container is very large, you might want to consider placing it on a caster or a turntable to facilitate rotation.

How often you water depends on the size of the container and the weather conditions. The larger the container, the less often you will need to water. When it becomes very hot or very windy, water will be needed more often.

If your containers can be reached by your normal irrigation, you won't have to give it a second thought. Hanging baskets and containers on the clubhouse patio will probably have to be watered by hand. This can be made easier with use of a water wand at the end of a hose, with an extender to reach hanging baskets.

With the proper selection of plant material that self-cleans (impatiens, begonia, ageratume, nicotiana, sweet alyssum), you won't have to consider



Designs and logos require no more care than normal plantings.

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clipping off faded flowers. If you use plants like geraniums or zinnias, cut the blooms away as they pass their peak to keep the container neat and in maximum bloom.

Designated designs

Another fun thing is planting flowered designs. Everyone is familiar with the friendly face of Mickey Mouse that welcomes millions to Disneyland and Disney World each year. The city of Denver plants its name in front of the capital building each year.

Last year's Expo in Vancouver saw its logo planted outside the main entrances. Commercial firms often plant their logos on a hillside in front of the administration building. Some parks plant geometric designs just for fun.

Designs and logos require no other care than normal plantings, except that a sharp eye must be kept to make sure one plant doesn't start to encroach on another plant's spot. When choosing plants for logos and designs, select compact, low growing ones in colors that are highly contrasting. Good examples are the red, yellow or green-leaved alternanthera; red, pink or white begonia; silver dusty miller; or blue ageratum.

When planning and planting logos and designs, it's best to plant them on the side of a hill or create a berm so the logo will be more visible to passersby.

Here are some annuals that can be easily adapted to the aforementioned uses:

Pansies. Use in spring or fall where summers are hot or all year-round in more temperate climates. They prefer sun as long as it's not too hot or dry. Look for the weather resistant F1 hybrids when selecting varieties.

Petunias. Versatile petunias are so popular for many reasons. For containers, you can select one of the larger flowered grandifloras, but you'll probably find that the multifloras will give you better performance with less maintenance and are more weather tolerant as well.

Salvia. Excellent for containers where a tall, spiked accent is needed in sun or part shade. Red, white, purple or salmon varieties are available.

Sweet Alyssum. Fragrant spreading plants with white, rose or violet flowers. Like sun, heat and dry conditions.

Vinca. Weather-, heat-, pollution- and sun-resistant.

Zinnia. Use these colorful annuals in the sun where air circulation is good to avoid mildew, a problem with zinnias. Use the low-growing zinnias in containers to take advantage of their compact habit.

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