

Selection, planting and care of Annuals

Flowering annuals or bedding plants are homeowner favorites. They are inexpensive and produce an abundance of brightly colored flowers from spring to frost. Some are even winter-hardy if protected by a light mulch.

Annuals complete their growing cycle within one growing season. They are usually purchased in early spring and planted as soon as the last frost is past. Several annuals, such as pansy, snapdragon, stocks and calendula, will withstand a light frost and can be planted earlier for establishment during cool weather.

The annuals industry has grown tremendously in the last several years. The impatiens is the most popular since it is so versatile, offering brilliant summer-to-fall bloom in shady beds, borders and containers.

Other leading annuals are geraniums from cuttings and seed, petunia, marigolds and fibrous begonias.

Where they grow—Annuals grow best when the soil in the planting site has been prepared beforehand to receive the transplants. Planting sites should be well-drained and in full sun or moderate shade, depending on plant species preference. Plant roots fail to thrive in wet soil so drainage is very important.

Adjust the soil to a pH of 6.3 to 6.7 for best growth.

Highly organic soils can range from pH 5.7 to 6.0. Amend the soil with high quality peat. At planting, break apart soil root masses slightly to prevent "root balling." This procedure will ensure rapid



Begonias are among the most popular annuals.

root expansion into surrounding soil.

Water plants after planting to hasten root establishment.

Before planting—After healthy plants have been purchased, plant them immediately. Water and fertilize on a regular basis.

Transplants, if held for a few days before planting, must be kept watered, since the small cell-packs dry readily. Place plants under the shade of trees and remove dead flowers as needed to prevent decay if planting is delayed.

Don't store plant material in a shop where gas engines are started. Build-up of ethylene gas, a product of combustion, can cause leaf drop and flower injury. High temperatures and low-light conditions will also lead to rapid deterioration of plants.

As plants grow and flower, it is necessary to pay some attention to small details of fertilization and dead flower removal.

Fertilize at time of planting by using a controlled release fertilizer product that will feed all season or use a liquid with 20-20-20, 23-19-17 or a similar fertilizer bi-weekly.

Remove dead flowers and broken branches weekly. This reduces botrytis fungus build-up and keeps plants healthy. Avoid overhead watering by using a soaker hose to wet the soil and not the foliage.

—Source: Dr. Charles T. Behnke, extension agent, horticulture, Ohio State University

Site selection



Impatiens: for shade or partial shade areas.

Moist locations: Angel trumpet; forget-me-not; hibiscus

Poor soil: California poppy; celosia; clarkia; cosmos; snow-on-the-mountain

Sunny locations: Aster; baby's breath; bachelor button; calendula; castor bean; celosia; celosia; cosmos; dianthus; flowering cabbage; gazania; geranium; larkspur; marigold; morning glory; moss rose; nasturtium; pansy; petunia; poppy; salvia; snapdragon; statice; strawflower; verbena; zinnia.

Shade or partial shade: Annual phlox; balsam; begonia; bellflower; calendula; clarkia; coleus; dwarf lobelia; forget-me-not; four o'clock; flowering tobacco; godetia; impatiens; larkspur; nasturtium; pansy; sweet alyssum; verbena; wallflower; wishbone plant

Arid locations: Ageratum; California poppy; cockscomb; coreopsis; cosmos; four o'clock; moss rose; petunia; statice; swan river daisy; verbena; zinnia.

Petunias: best in arid locales.

