

Annuals

Annuals – those plants that complete their entire life cycle within one year or less. This is a pretty cut and dried definition for a group of plants that are more than willing to provide lots of flowers in every conceivable shape, color and size. Many people grow annuals not only for the color they add to the garden, but also because they make splendid displays when cut and brought indoors. Most will last at least a week, and some, such as the China asters, Canterbury bells, marigolds and zinnias, may stay fresh and lovely for as long as two weeks. Some can be enjoyed indefinitely in the form of dried flowers. The most exciting of all, cutting does not rob the garden of color because the more annuals are cut, the more they bloom.



Cosmos

Many people grow annuals because they are so easy to grow. These flowers are generally started from seed or purchased as small plants. Start seedlings indoors 4 to 6 weeks before they are to be planted in the garden. Many annual seeds can be sown directly in the garden. Others do best if started in a propagation bed or tray and then transplanted as small plants. Some annuals that transplant well are marigolds, violas, pansies, and snapdragons.

It can be more convenient to purchase seedlings from a nursery, especially for annuals with very fine seeds, notably petunias and impatiens. These plants are difficult to grow from seed. If you do plan to buy stock from a nursery, choose your plants carefully. Look for deep green, healthy plants that are neither too compact nor too spindly. They will do better if not yet in bloom when planted. If you are unable to plant them right away, keep them in a lightly shaded spot and water carefully.

As indicated above, annuals live and die in one season. To perpetuate their kind they produce great quantities of seeds – as much as 50% of an annual's dry weight may be in seeds at the end of a season. To produce this many seeds, they must produce many flowers. If the flowers are cut before seeds are set, the plant will continue to produce flowers again and again, in an attempt to make the seeds. The more you cut, the more it blooms!

The most impressive use of annuals is in large groups of one color. To mix colors, you should plant small groups of one color. The least effective use is mixing the individual plants and colors.

Annuals give color to spring flowering bulb beds after the bulbs have finished blooming. Such beds may be unattractive while the bulb foliage is maturing and the annuals are too small to hide it. Keep in mind that most bulbs are planted deep enough that annuals may be planted over them. Where the bulbs are planted shallowly, plant spreading annuals around the grouping of bulbs. The spreading annuals will eventually cover the bulbs, even though none are actually planted over the bulbs.



Snapdragons

The best time to plant annuals is late in the afternoon. Before planting, thoroughly water your plants and the soil in your bed. Remove the plants from their pots gently to avoid disturbing the roots. If they are in peat pots, tear the pots slightly to allow the roots to grow through, and be sure to tear off the tops of the pots. If the roots are compacted, loosen them gently before you plant. Water well after planting and keep moist until the plants are established and new growth has started. Once they are established, the addition of a soluble fertilizer will encourage them to bloom.

Most annuals like at least 6 to 8 hours of sun per day. However, many annuals will do well in part shade or filtered sun. These include ageratum, browallia, coleus,

dianthus, fuschia, impatiens, lobelia, salvia, pansy, and wishbone flower. Few, if any, annuals will do well in complete shade. If you have plants that appear to be suffering from too much sun, you should move them.

Annuals do not require a lot of fertilizing. In general, you can fertilize once or twice during the growing season. Soil that has been enriched with compost will not generally need additional fertilizer.

Annuals need about an inch of water each week, more if in a container. You may have to help if the weather does not cooperate. Water deeply to encourage deep root growth. If you use an overhead sprinkler, use it early in the day so that the foliage will be dry by nightfall. This will lessen the chance of disease.

References

Crockett, James Underwood. *Annuals*. Alexandria, Virginia: Time-Life Books, 1971.

Ortho Books. *Ortho's Complete Guide to Successful Gardening*. Ortho Books, 1983.