

## ANNUAL GARDENS for BUSINESS and HOME

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"Variety is the spice of life", according to the old saying. Annual gardens are a favorite among gardeners who like to change ideas and styles with each successive year. Annuals provide intensive color interest all season long and may be used by a business or a home gardener to draw attention to a particular location. In fact, many business owners are finding that annual garden display beds have increased customer turnout, resulting in higher plant sales.

**Starting an Annual Garden**

**Prepare the Soil:** Often the most ignored step in establishing annual gardens in home and business settings. However, proper soil preparation is paramount for a successful annual garden.

**Use the O word:** Organic matter in the form of sphagnum peat moss, compost, or rotted manure should be incorporated into the proposed garden site. The organic matter should be incorporated into the site the fall before planting the bed. Incorporating organic matter improves soil texture and soil nutrient holding capacity.

**Words on Rototilling:** Rototilling or deep digging your annual garden in early spring loosens the topsoil so annual roots can spread easily. Annuals are notoriously shallow-rooted, but tilling to a 12" depth provides an optimal environment for plant growth and establishment. Till or dig when the soil has dried or clodding will occur. Extra care must be taken not to till around the root zone of trees and shrubs that surround your garden. Avoid tillage within the drip line as injury or death to your favorite tree or shrub may

occur. Oaks are particularly sensitive to tillage operations.

**Oh no! It's Clay!:** Gardeners or businesses who find that their soil consists of heavy clay are faced with two choices: moving to a better site, or raising their annual beds above the clay. The latter is certainly a wiser choice.

**Start weed free:** A little Round-up (glyphosate) goes a long way in preparing a weed-free bed for annual plants. Apply glyphosate (following label directions) on a sunny, calm spring day on emerged weeds. A second application 2-3 weeks later often is necessary to "clean up" any survivors. Treflan (trifluralin) may also be incorporated into the soil during tillage operations to control germinating grasses and some broadleaf weeds. Follow label directions to avoid injury to sensitive species.

**Fertilizer:** Plants require adequate amounts of nutrients present in the soil. Preplant incorporate a pound or two (2 or 3 cups) of 5-10-5 per 100 square feet when rototilling in the spring. The main idea is to have enough phosphorus present at the root zone level for plant uptake. (Phosphorus does not move in the soil.) Light applications of a straight nitrogen fertilizer are often necessary later in the season, especially if plants are watered frequently or a heavy organic mulch was used. "Water in" any broadcasted granular fertilizer to avoid foliar burn. Applications of liquid fertilizer can be made with portable injectors. Applications of 300 ppm N can be made weekly or as needed.

**Watering Correctly - The ultimate challenge:** Many textbooks of gardening rec-

ommend an inch of water per week for annual gardens. I have found that the best method of determining whether a garden needs water is to dig 6 to 8" down into the soil to determine if indeed the soil is dry. Letting the soil dry out between waterings reduces the likelihood of soil born diseases. Whatever the method, make sure you water deeply when it is needed. "Wimpy" waterings of less than an inch do not provide adequate moisture to the root zone. Water the garden in the early morning to reduce evaporative loss and also to prevent foliar diseases. "Soaker" hoses or "T" tapes are excellent alternative irrigation methods to overhead sprinklers in small gardens. These methods reduce evaporative water loss and help to avoid water-borne diseases.

**Weeding:** Annuals are shallow rooted, so deep hoeing is not recommended. Using a "scuffle" or "dutch" hoe just below the soil surface works wonders in an annual garden. Staying off the annual beds after planting is very important as annuals do not appreciate compacted soil.

**Flower Removal:** "Deadheading" flowers which are past their prime encourages additional flower development. "Pinching back" many annuals (ie: petunias or marigolds) results in compact plants with more flowers than non-pinched plants.

**Mulch:** Annual gardens must be mulched to reduce evaporative loss during hot Midwestern summers. Mulching also keeps the soil surface cool, prevents weed establishment, and prevents surface clodding. A light bark mulch is preferred because dark, heavy mulches absorb heat from the mid-day sun. I personally prefer a light pine needle mulch because it reflects solar rays, it is aromatic, and very decorative. Mulch should never be applied more than 3" deep

in an annual garden.

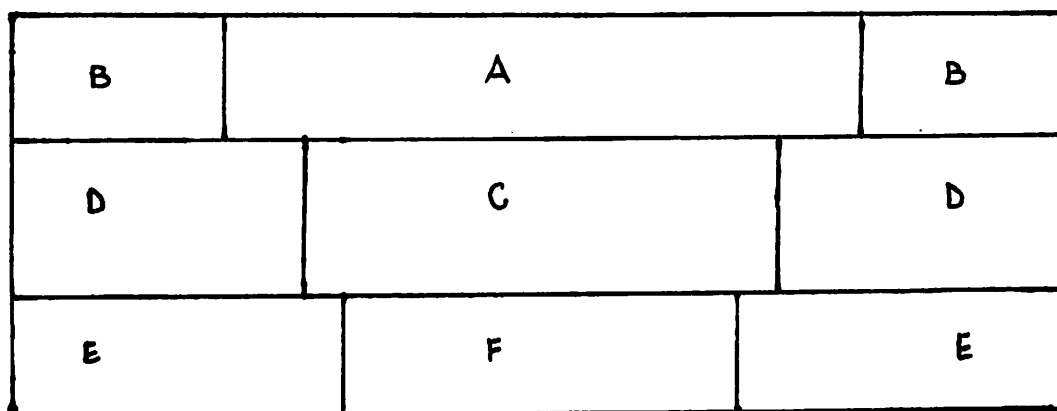
**Design Implications:** Many annuals require full sun for optimum growth, so locate your garden so it receives sunlight most of the day. However, many annual plants grown in the Midwest prefer a light shade during the hottest part of the afternoon around 3:00 p.m.. A slight southeastern orientation for annual beds is optimal. An annual garden bed with a slight downward slant from back to front improves drainage and makes the garden visible from further away.

**Keep it Simple:** A popular approach to garden design is to purchase 10 varieties of annuals and plant them in a 10 square foot area. However, I do not recommend the "chaos" approach to annual design. Higher visual impact is achieved when no more than 3 different color combinations are used. Use complimentary color pairs or different shades of the same color to create a unified look.

Remember that "hot" colors such as reds and yellows attract a lot of attention and create a "come and see me" look. Blues and pinks create a cool sophisticated look in an annual design. I enjoy using white in annual design because it not only "catches the eye" from a distance, but it also softens bright color combinations. A white border leads the eye along an annual bed to focus attention towards an entry or business sign.

Following are annual selections based on a rectangular bed format for either a warm or cool color garden. Mix and match your favorite annuals for a particular area to create a garden that reflects your individual preferences and taste. After all, variety is "the spice of life" and annual gardens provide variety and spice for home gardens and business settings.

Garden Size: 20' x 8'



<b>MIX and MATCH PLANT LIST</b>			
Trouble-Free Garden / Full Sun			
Area	Warm Colors	Area	Cool Colors
A	Marigold - First Lady or Cosmos - Bright Lights	A	Snapdragon - Rocket White or Pink
B	Cosmos - Sunny Red or Marigold - Marvel Yellow Chiffon or Gomphrena - Woodcreek Red	B	Centurea - Blue Diadem or Gomphrena - Globosa Mix
C	Melampodium - Medallion or Annual Gallardia - Indian Blanket	C	Salvia - Rhea
D	Salvia - Scarlet Queen or Geranium - Pinto Red	D	Vinca - Pretty in Rose or Parasol or Geranium - Pinto Quicksilver or Petunia - Sheer Madness
E	Dianthus - Telstar Picotee or Verbena - Romance Scarlett	E	Alyssum - New Carpet of Snow or Alyssum - Snow Carpet
F	Petunia - Red Carpet Improved or Petunia - Polo Red Target	F	Dusty Miller - Snowstorm or Silverdust or Nierembergia - Purple Robe
<p><b>TIPS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Avoid straight line planting, offset the transplants in a triangle pattern.</li> <li>* Set transplants so crowns are at soil level.</li> <li>* Water plants after setting. You may need to water up to 3-4 times a day until establishment.</li> <li>* Try to set transplants on a cloudy/cool day after the recommended planting date for your area.</li> </ul>			