

PERENNIALS AS BEDDING PLANTS

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Many bedding plant growers are now growing perennial plants to compliment their annual sales. These are grown in the greenhouse rather than in the field. The perennials are usually sold before the annuals and tend to "open" the spring sales.

Perennials that are being grown are: Pansy, Viola, Johnny-Jump-Ups, Primrose, Delphinium, English Daisy, Basket of Gold, Candytuft, Lupine, Arabis, Columbine, Foxglove, Gaillardia, Shasta Daisy, Myosotis, Hollyhocks, Gloriosa Daisy, Canterbury Bells and Geum.

The larger producers sow perennial seeds between October 10-20. These are ready to transplant about mid-November. Some growers prefer to sow seeds November 10-15 and transplant right after Christmas.

After transplanting, the plants are grown at about 60°F. night temperatures for 3-4 weeks. The temperature is then lowered 5 degrees per week gradually to about 40-45°F. At this temperature they continue to grow very slowly. They are held at this temperature until about 3-4 weeks before expected sales. The temperature is raised to about 55-60°F.

The plants are fertilized shortly after transplanting to get them started. Potassium nitrate or calcium nitrate at the rate of 1 lb./100 gals. is preferred. The 20-20-20 soluble fertilizers can result in an ammonium build-up because of low temperatures and a tendency to overwater during the winter months.

The lower leaves of many of these plants may turn yellow and gradually die. This is usually due to poor growing conditions; low light and low temperatures. When this occurs, Botrytis can become a problem. Sprays of benomyl, captan or zineb will help control it.

About 3-4 weeks before expected sales the temperature is raised and the plants are again fertilized. Usually the plants respond rapidly and look good for sales in late March and early April.

Most of the perennials should be sold before or along with the first annuals. Sales for perennials are limited. Do not grow too many. If heating oil is expensive again this winter, it may not be profitable to grow them at all.