



LANDSCAPING WITH ANNUALS

Annuals are plants that have been developed to produce a colorful display of flowers or foliage for most of the summer. These plants complete their life cycle in one season and are usually killed by frost in the fall. Annuals are relatively quick to establish and easy to grow and care for. Most annuals prefer full sun, but many will tolerate partial shade. Some, such as impatiens and begonias, do best in light shade or filtered sun. Other things to consider when landscaping with annuals are soil preparation, transplanting, care, and pest management.

SOIL PREPARATION

Before working the soil in the springtime, you may want to add organic matter, lime, or fertilizer. Heavy clay soil should be amended with at least 2" of organic matter in the form of peat moss, manure, or compost. Organic matter helps create air spaces and improves drainage. A yearly addition of organic matter benefits most soils.

In addition of lime should be made if the soil pH is lower than 6.0. If you are unsure of your soil pH, you can purchase an inexpensive soil test kit or send your sample to the Lehigh office of the Penn State Extension. The ideal pH for annuals is 6.0-7.0. 5lb. of lime per 100 sq. ft. is generally recommended.

Granular fertilizer added to the soil will help plants get off to a healthy start. A 5-10-5 or similar formulation should be spread according to label instructions. Additional applications of a liquid fertilizer can be made monthly throughout the season to assist in growth and flower production. Fertilizers containing slow-release nitrogen can be applied less frequently due to

their sustained release of nutrients. A second application in 6-8 weeks is still beneficial.

After spreading the amendments in the garden, spade the top 6-8" of soil incorporating organic matter, lime (if necessary), and fertilizer all at once. Work the soil just enough to thoroughly mix the additives.

TRANSPLANTING

Once the soil has been prepared, and danger of frost (May 15th) has passed, seedlings may be transplanted. Dig a hole just slightly larger than the root ball. *Delicately* remove moistened plant from its container. Place the plant in the hole and fill in around the root ball with soil, firming it gently. Always water all transplants as soon after planting as possible. If you've used peat pots, bury or remove the edges to prevent drying.

CARE

Waterings should be accomplished by deep soakings as infrequently as possible. This encourages the development of deep, strong roots, and discourages diseases and weeds. Liquid fertilizer may be easily applied while watering. Be sure to follow directions for proper dilution rates.

Weeds can become a problem. Preemergent chemical controls such as Preen can be used to reduce the problem. Mulching the area helps hold in moisture, cools plant roots, and prevents weeds as well.

Grooming the flowerbed will result in higher quality plants with a greater number of flowers. Pinch back annuals when they are young to encourage lateral branching and give plants a dense growth habit. This practice also corrects leggy, stretched-out growth. If possible, remove flower heads to prevent plants from going to seed. This way, the plant's energy can be used to produce more flowers rather than unwanted seed.