

**Annual
Bedding Plants
for Louisiana —
A Handbook**

LSU
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Annual Bedding Plants for Louisiana - A Handbook

Flowering annuals provide much desired landscaping color in many residential and commercial plantings. They provide season-long color throughout the year and also add other characteristics such as foliage color, forms and textures. An annual is defined as a plant that produces flowers and seeds within one growing season after planting, then dies. Sometimes perennials are treated as annuals.

There are several important items to consider to be successful with bedding plants in Louisiana. These include soil pH, proper planting depth, irrigation management, removal of old flowers, planting time, fertilization management, bed preparation and cultivar selection. This publication provides

information to help home gardeners in Louisiana with bedding plant selection and proper care.

Using Flowering Annuals

In the well-planned landscape, annuals should be wisely selected and arranged to help bring to the landscape a high degree of order.

Annuals of many different colors scattered over wide areas destroy the desired harmony of a planned landscape. Unifying all segments of a total landscape should be your goal. Annuals should be a vital part of the entire area, rather than a yearly addition to existing plantings.

Colors need to be grouped together. The visual display of one color in a given area catches the eye more quickly than a sprinkling of many colors over large areas. A harmony of colors present at any one season is desirable.

Ease of maintenance is a major concern. Plant only those you can care for properly. Planting annuals in one large bed is more desirable than having small insignificant beds throughout the landscape.

Annuals, because of their versatile nature, are important for seasonal interest. They can be selected to provide colorful warmth during winter or to give splendor to the garden during the difficult summer months.

The hardiest annuals can be planted during the fall. With little protection, they will survive the winter and bloom in very early spring. Tender annuals are planted outdoors in the early spring after danger of frost has passed.

Seeding and Transplanting

Most annual seeds are very small and should be sown in moist, finely pulverized soil at a shallow depth.

Plant seeds of tender annuals indoors two weeks to one month before the danger of frost has passed. This will ensure early flowering plants. Factors affecting young plants are more easily controlled if seeds are sown indoors.

When the weather will permit and annuals have two to four true leaves per plant, transplant outdoors. Avoid a shock of temperature changes by conditioning the seedlings to the lower temperatures before transplanting them. You can do this by subjecting the seedlings to the lower outdoor temperatures before transplanting takes place. If seedlings are left in dark shaded areas, they will grow into weak, spindly plants. For best results, transplant on a cool shady afternoon.



Bed Preparation

Provide well-drained fertile garden loam soil for annuals. Good internal drainage is as important as surface drainage. Add peat moss, pine bark or a similar material to beds to improve the soil. If drainage is a problem, raise the bed and add a generous amount of coarse sand to the bed.

Annuals differ in sun and shade requirements. Generally, they thrive best in areas that receive sunlight during much of the day. Locate the bed in areas that meet the light requirements of the plants.

Remember that soil pH is important for bedding plants. The recommended pH for most bedding plants is 5.4-6.8. Modify soil pH according to soil test recommendations.

Cultivating Annuals

Bed preparation goes a long way in achieving a successful color planting in the landscape. It is very important to keep beds free from weeds. An unkept bed of annuals adds little to the landscape even though the color is present.

Annuals will thrive under a proper program of site selection, bed preparation and fertilization. Begin a fertilization program at planting. A complete slow-release fertilizer can be incorporated into the landscape bed before planting, or it can be broadcast over the bed after planting. Apply at the recommended rate. Light applications of a water-soluble fertilizer can be made at planting and at regular intervals thereafter, but are not needed when a slow-release fertilizer is used properly. Avoid using 8-8-8, 13-13-13 and similar fertilizers in your flowering annual beds. These do not provide the ideal response desired, and they need to be applied much more frequently than do slow-release formulations. Remember that excessive fertilization leads to excessive plant growth and results in fewer flowers.

Irrigation requirements vary according to the flowering annual planted. Avoid overwatering. When normal rainfall does not provide adequate moisture (about ½ inch to 1 inch a week), supplemental water will be needed. A thorough soaking is preferred instead of frequent sprinklings.

Pest Control

Insect control is a major factor in the success or failure of any flower garden. There is hardly a plant grown which is not subject to insect attack at some stage in its growth. Insects may attack the roots, stems, leaves or blossoms. Gardeners should manage landscape plantings to avoid pest problems and apply pesticides only when necessary.

A good job of insect control can be accomplished with a few basic insecticides. Sevin, applied as a spray or dust, will control most beetles and caterpillars that feed on foliage and blooms. Use Sevin or Orthene to control stink bugs. Wireworms, grubworms and cutworms can be controlled by incorporating Diazinon in the soil before planting. Malathion or Orthene will control aphids, mealybugs and some spider mites. Use a miticide spray for hard-to-kill spider mites such as the two-spotted.

Warm Season Bedding Plants

More than 80 percent of bedding plants sold for landscape use in Louisiana are classified as warm season annuals. Major warm season bedding plants include ageratum, begonias, cockscomb (celosia), coleus, impatiens, marigolds, periwinkle (vinca), petunia, portulaca, purslane, salvia and zinnia. Some other warm season bedding plants, such as sunflowers, torenia (wishbone flower), geraniums, gomphrena and melampodium are available, too.

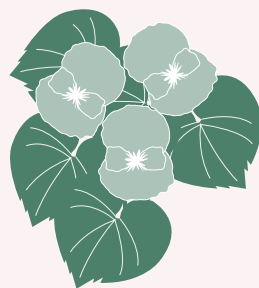
Ageratums

Ageratums are not nearly as popular as they were several years ago. Flower colors available include blue, white, lavender and pink. Ageratums are closely related to the native wildflower blue mist. Plant in sun to partial shade. Ageratums are a good spring flowering bedding plant, but usually lack desirable heat tolerance to perform well through the summer. Good performance can be expected from early spring through late June or early July in most years.



Begonias

Begonias remain one of the most popular warm season bedding plants in Louisiana. Depending on the cultivar selected, begonias will perform well in full sun to shaded areas. Those with green and red foliage are available. Usually, green foliage cultivars are less tolerant of full sun than the cultivars with red or bronze foliage. Flower colors include rose, red, white and pink. Good performance can be expected through the summer with proper care. Avoid close spacing between plants and overhead irrigation. This favors development of stem rot and root rot. The most commonly planted cultivars in Louisiana are Vodka (bright scarlet), Rum (white with rose edges), Gin (bright rose-pink), Whiskey (pure white) and Brandy (clear pink). These are collectively referred to as the cocktail series.



Cockscomb

Cockscomb is commonly referred to as celosia. Several different species and cultivars are available. Plant in full sun. Cockscomb is more tolerant of poor soil than are other bedding plants. Flower forms include feathers, spikes, plumes and crested. Flower colors include red, pink, yellow and orange. Cockscomb makes good fresh and dried cut flowers.



Coleus

Many new cultivars of coleus have become available the last several years. Older cultivars generally do best in shade or partial shade, but many of these new cultivars are referred to as “sun loving” and perform great in full sun. Coleus should be grown for its foliage characteristics. Flowering is not desired, so pinch off flower spikes as they develop. More information is available in Extension publication 2677, “The Colors of Coleus.”



Impatiens

More impatiens are planted in the United States than any other warm season bedding plant. They are the most recommended bedding plant for shady areas. Morning sun on impatiens is okay, but for best performance, shade is needed for midday and late afternoon. One common problem with impatiens is tall, leggy growth caused by excessive shading and planting too closely together. If plants become tall, pinch back to reduce height. Impatiens will be good landscape performers from spring through the fall.



Marigolds

Marigolds are available in numerous flower colors and growth habits. French marigolds are shorter and produce small flowers. African marigolds are taller and produce large flowers. Removing old flowers on marigolds is important to keep the plants continuously flowering. Plant marigolds in full sun. Marigolds need to be irrigated during dry weather, but minimize moisture on flower petals or flower blight will develop. Recommended marigold cultivars include Discovery, Inca, Excel, Bonanza, Hero, Janie, Antigua and Perfection.



Periwinkles

Periwinkles are commonly called vinca. These are a favorite among Louisiana home gardeners. Plant in full sun. Irrigation can be limited; they are very drought tolerant. Numerous flower colors are available. Periwinkles should not be planted until May. This late planting allows the soil temperatures to elevate and reduce root and stem rot problems. Recommended cultivars include Pacifica and Cooler. A new cultivar that has excellent potential is the Mediterranean series.



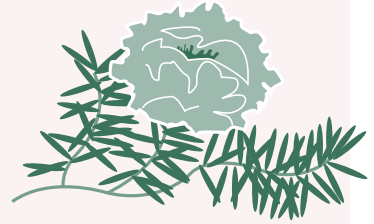
Petunias

Petunias are a good warm season bedding plant for providing landscape color in the spring. Summer humidity and temperatures usually are not favorable for petunias. In south Louisiana, petunias can be used as a cool season bedding plant for the fall and winter. Plant petunias in full sun to slightly shaded areas. Numerous flower colors and cultivars are available. A good range of flower sizes is available, too.



Portulaca

Portulaca is also called moss rose. This bedding plant is drought tolerant, similar to periwinkles. Flower colors include orange, red, white, yellow, pink, salmon, lavender and purple. Portulaca is a good, low maintenance warm season bedding plant.



Purslane

Purslane is very closely related to portulaca. A good range of flower colors is available. Plant in full sun and limit irrigation. It is a good plant for hanging baskets.



Salvia

Salvia is best adapted to full sun, but it can adapt to partially shaded areas. Flower colors include red, white, salmon, pink and lavender. Salvias usually do well through the early summer, but they typically cannot be relied on to perform well through the summer and into the fall. Pinching off old flowers is important. Salvias are good for attracting hummingbirds. Petal spot is a problem on white flowering cultivars. Perennial salvias are better performers in Louisiana than annual salvias.



Zinnia

Zinnias do well in Louisiana when rainfall is below average. Plant zinnias in full sun. Many different flower colors and growth habits are available. Some cultivars make good cut flowers. Most are easily established from seed. Limit irrigation. Leaf spot and other foliar diseases can cause problems on zinnias.



Cool Season Bedding Plants

Pansies dominate the cool season bedding plant market in Louisiana. Other major cool season bedding plants include dianthus, snapdragons, viola and ornamental kale/cabbage. Alyssum and stock are two cool season bedding plants growing in popularity.

Dianthus

Dianthus have become one of the most reliable cool season bedding plants. They require a slightly higher pH than some other bedding plants. Plant dianthus in full sun. Flower color will be good through the late fall and winter, but the spring flower performance is excellent. Dianthus will perform well through April in Louisiana. The recommended cultivar of dianthus for Louisiana is Telstar, a Louisiana Select winner in 1996.



Kale

Ornamental kale and cabbage are becoming more popular for cool season landscape plantings. They are best adapted to full sun or partial shade. Foliage is the desired characteristic. Kale is usually recognized by fringed leaves, and cabbage has rounded leaves. Flowers are not desired (most ornamental kale and cabbage will begin flowering in mid-spring). Be careful when fertilizing kale and cabbage. Excessive nitrogen applications lead to cold damage. Recommended cultivars include Peacock, Chiodori and Osaka.



Pansies

No other cool-season bedding plant comes close to pansies in popularity. They are best adapted to full sun. Don't plant pansies too early in the fall. Plant pansies around October 15 in north Louisiana and November 1 in south Louisiana. Numerous flower colors and patterns are available. Plant solid colors in masses for the best visual effect. Recommended cultivars are Bingo, Majestic Giant and Crystal Bowl.



Snapdragons

Snapdragons are a cool season bedding plant that has good flowering performance in late winter and early spring. Plant in full sun, although snapdragons can tolerate some limited afternoon shade. Tall, medium and short cultivars are available. Tall cultivars make excellent cut flowers. Numerous flower colors are available. Recommended cultivars include Tahiti, Liberty, Rocket and Floral Showers.



Violas

Violas are a dwarf version of pansy, frequently also referred to as Johnny-jump-ups. Plant in full sun to some slight afternoon shade. Violas are great container plants. Plant at the same time as pansies.



Bedding plants for specific uses

Edging and Borders

Ageratum
Cockscomb
Alyssum
Begonia
Dianthus
Dusty Miller
French Marigolds
Pansy
Petunia
Portulaca

Hanging Baskets

Alyssum
Impatiens
Petunias
Purslane
Portulaca

Fragrant Flowers

Alyssum
Flowering Tobacco
Petunia
Stock
Dianthus

Partial Shade to Shade Locations

Begonia
Coleus
Impatiens
Torenia

Hot and Dry Locations

Periwinkle
Melampodium
Cockscomb
Zinnia
Purslane
Portulaca

Container Plantings

Begonias
Periwinkle
Petunias
Coleus
Pansy
Viola
French Marigolds
Torenia



Impatiens

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