



Bedding Plants for Louisiana Landscapes

LSU
AgCenter
Research & Extension



Bedding Plants for Louisiana Landscapes

Introduction

Bedding plants are commonly used in residential and commercial landscapes to provide color. No other group of plants can so quickly and economically create a colorful landscape. In addition to flowers, bedding plants may be grown for their colorful foliage or interesting forms or textures. With proper selection, they can be used to provide color throughout the year.

Bedding plants are classified into two groups based on the temperatures they prefer. Cool-season bedding plants, such as pansies, dianthus, snapdragons, stock and calendulas, do best in the cold to mild temperatures of October through early May and generally tolerate typical winter freezes without protection.

Warm-season bedding plants, such as torenia, marigolds, periwinkle and zinnias, grow and flower best in the warm to hot months of April to October. Since they are sensitive to freeze damage, they are planted after danger of frost is over.

Most bedding plants are annuals. These short-lived plants grow from seed, bloom and die within one growing season. The transient nature of annuals means that at the end of their season when they are no longer attractive, annuals are removed and replaced with new plantings.

Some commonly used warm-season bedding plants are actually tender perennials grown as annuals. Tender perennials, such as impatiens, periwinkles, blue daze, pentas and begonias, are generally grouped with the true annuals because in most parts of the United States they only last one season before dying in winter's freezes. Tender perennials grown as annuals have more stamina in the garden than true annuals. Most true annuals do not make it all the way through our exceptionally long summer growing season. Tender perennials, on the other hand, bloom from late spring until cold weather arrives in late November. If not for winter freezes, these plants would live and bloom for another year, and sometimes do when mild winters occur.

Using Colorful Bedding Plants

Bedding plants are the most important group of plants we use for planting flower beds. Through careful selection, gardeners can grow bedding plants of just about any color or color combination they can imagine during any time of the year and on plants that range in height from a few inches to several feet. These versatile plants can be used in flower beds, mixed borders, pockets among shrubs or ground covers, containers, hanging baskets and window boxes.

Annual plantings are not low maintenance. Keep in mind that they will need regular care through the summer when deciding where, how large and how many beds you will plant.

Since the main function of bedding plants is to provide color, some tips on using color in the landscape are appropriate.

1) The human eye is powerfully drawn to color. Place color where you want to draw attention. A flower bed by the trash cans will not make them look better, it will just ensure that everybody notices them.

2) Consider how well the colors you intend to combine look together. Generally, it is more effective to combine a few complementary or harmonious colors than to plant many different colors in the same bed.

3) Plant beds in masses or drifts of individual colors.

4) Use colorful beds around outdoor living areas where you and your family spend time and can appreciate them.



Preparing The Soil

Generally, bedding plants perform best in well-prepared beds with good drainage.

First, remove any weeds or other unwanted plants from the bed. Next, turn the soil to a depth of about eight inches. Spread a two- to four-inch layer of compost, rotted leaves, aged manure, composted finely ground pine bark or peat moss over the bed, and then evenly sprinkle a light application of an all purpose fertilizer. Thoroughly blend the organic matter and fertilizer into the bed, rake smooth and you're ready to plant.

If the drainage is in question, raise the beds about 8 inches above grade by adding extra organic matter and/or a commercially available soil mix (topsoil or garden soil).

In areas where the native soil is heavy clay and difficult to work with, raised beds can be created by forming beds 8 to 10 inches high on top of the existing soil using commercially available topsoil or garden soil.

Seeding And Transplanting

Although purchasing transplants at local nurseries is the most common way to obtain bedding plants, you may also grow them yourself from seeds. Growing them

from seed allows you the opportunity to grow a wide variety of bedding plants that are not available at your local nurseries.

Seeds may be started in containers indoors (in sunny windows or under artificial lights), in hotbeds or cold frames, in greenhouses or outside, if the weather permits. The biggest challenge to planting seeds to grow transplants is providing excellent growing conditions to produce quality transplants.

You may also plant the seeds directly into the garden bed where they will grow. This is called direct seeding.

A wide selection of transplants in cell packs, four-inch pots and larger containers is seasonally available at local nurseries and garden centers. Before you go to the nursery, look at the size of the area to be planted and try to estimate how many plants will be needed. On average, bedding plants are spaced about 8 inches apart. Also think about color schemes and desired heights.

Select stocky transplants with healthy foliage and roots. Avoid transplants that have lots of faded flowers and yellow leaves.

Choose bedding plants that are appropriate for the time and season when you are planting. It doesn't make much sense to plant cool-season bedding plants at the end of their growing season in April when they will finish in May, for instance.

Consider Growing Conditions

Choose annuals well suited to the growing conditions provided by the location where they will be planted. Light is especially important. For beds that receive at least six to eight hours of sun, choose sun-loving bedding plants. In beds that receive about two to four hours of morning sun, choose bedding plants that prefer shady conditions. Even annuals that like part shade to shady locations, however, will generally not perform as well in full shade where they receive no direct sun during the day. Caladiums, planted from tubers or as growing plants, are one of the best choices for color in full shade.

Planting Transplants

It is important to plant transplants within a week of purchasing them for best results. Plant transplants so that the top of the root ball is about level with the soil of the bed. Planting transplants too deeply can cause problems.

Bedding plants generally look best and the beds will fill in better when the rows are staggered. Lay out the first row of plants spaced properly. The second row is laid behind the first row at the appropriate spacing from it, but the plants are placed between the plants of the first row so that they form triangles with those plants.



Once the bed is planted, mulch and thoroughly water the plants in. You may use a hose-end fertilizer applicator and water them in with a fertilizer solution to get them off to a good start. Newly planted bedding plants do not have well established root systems and should be watered thoroughly every few days if the weather is dry the first few weeks after planting.

Caring For Bedding Plants

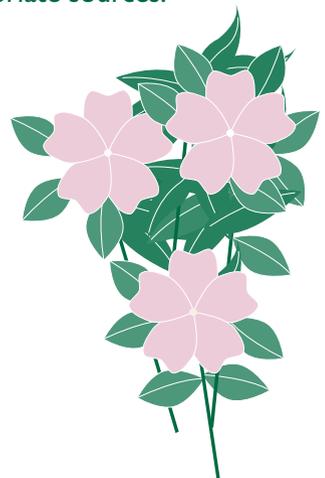
Flower beds of colorful bedding plants add a lot to the landscape but require a fair amount of maintenance to stay looking their best. Keeping beds well weeded is critical. A two-inch layer of mulch will help considerably in keeping weeds from growing, and using preemergence herbicides (weed preventers) may help in some situations. But always plan on having to do some hand weeding.

Watering cool-season bedding plants is not as critical during the cool moist weather of the winter and early spring but is often needed as the weather warms up in April. Warm-season bedding plants often experience hot, dry weather during summer, and irrigation will be critical to keeping the plants healthy and attractive.

When watering is needed, it is healthier for the plants to water them deeply and occasionally (once or twice a week) rather than lightly every day. Since water on the foliage increases disease problems and water on the flowers can shorten their attractive life, consider watering your bedding plants with soaker hoses.

Grooming plants to keep the beds looking their best is important because they attract so much attention. Remove faded flowers and unattractive foliage as needed. Stake taller growing bedding plants if they begin to lean awkwardly. As bedding plants finish and become less attractive, remove them promptly, and either mulch the area or replant it.

Although the best bedding plants are relatively free from major insect and disease problems, these pests are not uncommon in the flower garden. The first step in proper control is to identify the problem properly. Contact your local LSU AgCenter Extension office for help with this. Once the pest is properly identified, you can determine if applying pesticides is needed and get appropriate recommendations from your local LSU AgCenter Extension agent or other appropriate sources.



Warm-season Bedding Plants

Name	Light	Spacing Inches	Height Inches	Use	Comments
Amaranthus <i>Amaranthus tricolor</i>	Sun	18-24	2-5 feet	Background	Grown for colorful foliage
Ageratum <i>Ageratum houstonianum</i>	Sun	8	8-12	Bedding; Planters	Fuzzy flowers in blue, pink, white
Balsam, Lady Slipper <i>Impatiens balsamina</i>	Sun or Shade	8-12	12-36	Bedding	Upright plants with red, pink, purple or white flowers
Blue Daze* <i>Evolvulus glomeratus</i>	Sun or Part Shade	8-12	8-10	Bedding; Containers; Long blooming season	Low, mounding plants with gray backed foliage; true blue flowers
Wax Begonia* <i>Begonia semperflorens</i>	Part Sun to Shade	8-12	6-10	Bedding; containers	Green or bronze foliage; white, pink or red flowers
Candlestick Plant* <i>Cassia alata</i>	Sun	36	5-10 feet	Background; Screen	Very tall; spikes of golden yellow in late summer
Castor bean* <i>Ricinus communis</i>	Sun	36	5-10 feet	Foliage; Screen	Tall; star shaped foliage purple or bronze; seeds poisonous
Celosia (crested) <i>Celosia cristata</i>	Sun	24	10-18	Bedding; Cut flower; Dried flower	Unusual flower heads in red, orange, yellow or pink
Celosia (plume) <i>Celosia argentea</i>	Sun	24	12-36	Bedding; Cut flower; Dried flower	Plume-shaped flowers in red, orange, yellow or pink
Cleome <i>Cleome hasslerana</i>	Sun to Part shade	15	36-48	Cut flower; Background	Tall, easy to grow; flowers in purple, white and pink.
Coleus* <i>Solenostemon scutellarioides</i>	Sun or Shade depending on type	12	12-36	Container; Bedding; Background	Colorful foliage; cuttings root easily
Cosmos <i>Cosmos bipinnatus</i>	Sun	8-12	12-36	Background; Bedding; Cut flower	Does best during mild periods in spring and fall, poorly in summer and winter; Flowers pink, burgundy, white
Cosmos <i>Cosmos sulphureus</i>	Sun	8-12	12-36	Bedding; Background; Cut flower	Heat tolerant; Excellent in summer; Flowers yellow, orange, mahogany

Warm-season Bedding Plants

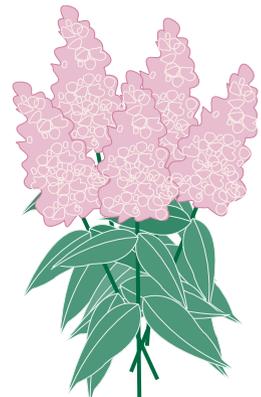
Name	Light	Spacing Inches	Height Inches	Use	Comments
Cypress vine <i>Ipomoea quamoclit</i>	Sun	12	vine	Vine; Screen; Humming-bird	Delicate vine with red flowers; reseeds
Dahlia* <i>Dahlia pinnata</i>	Sun or Part Shade	12-18	12-24	Bedding; container	Often do poorly during summer heat
Dusty Miller* <i>Senecio cineraria</i>	Sun	8-12	8-15	Bedding; Containers	Excellent silvery foliage; drought tolerant
Gomphrena <i>Gomphrena globosa</i>	Sun	6-10	10-24	Bedding; Cut flowers; Dried flowers	Round flower heads in shades of purple, white, pink, red
Hyacinth bean* <i>Dolichos lablab</i>	Sun	12	vine	Vine; Screen; Cut flowers	Purple/lavendar flowers; Shiny purple seed pods; Long bloom season
Impatiens* <i>Impatiens wallerana</i>	Shade to Part Shade	8-10	8-24	Bedding; Hanging baskets; Containers	Reliable color for shady areas; White, red, orange, pink, purple flowers
Marigold (African) <i>Tagetes erecta</i>	Sun	12	24-36	Cut flowers; Bedding	Yellow, gold or orange flowers larger than French
Marigold (French) <i>Tagetes patula</i>	Sun	8	8-15	Bedding, Containers	Yellow, gold, orange or mahogany flowers smaller than African
Moonvine <i>Ipomoea alba</i>	Sun	12	vine	Vine; Screen	White, fragrant flowers open rapidly at dusk
Morning glory <i>Ipomoea purpurea</i>	Sun	6	vine	Vine; Screen	Flowers rose, pink, blue or white close in late morning
Moss rose <i>Portulaca grandiflora</i>	Sun	10	4-6	Baskets; Bedding	Very low growing, large, attractive flowers in many colors. Drought tolerant.
Ornamental Sweet Potato <i>Ipomoea batatas</i>	Sun or Part Shade	36	8-10	Cover large areas; Ground cover	Colorful foliage dark purple, chartreuse, or variegated; returns each year from perennial roots



Warm-season Bedding Plants

Name	Light	Spacing Inches	Height Inches	Use	Comments
Periwinkle* <i>Catharanthus rosea</i>	Sun	10-12	12-15	Bedding; Containers	Bushy plants produce flowers in white, red, purple, pink. Disease problems common. Drought tolerant.
Salvia* <i>Salvia splendens</i>	Sun or Part Shade	14-21	10-24	Hummingbirds; Bedding	Flower spikes in red, white, purple, pink
Texas Sage* <i>Salvia coccinea</i>	Sun or Part Shade	12	24	Bedding, hummingbirds	Red, pink or white flowers; Long blooming season
Garden Verbena <i>Verbena x hybrida</i>	Sun	18	8-18	Bedding	Perennial verbenas are much better bedding plants; This vervena generally does not last long
Common Zinnia <i>Zinnia elegans</i>	Sun	12	6-36	Bedding; Cut flowers	Outstanding range of color; Easy to grow but prone to various diseases in hot, humid weather
Narrow-leaf Zinnia <i>Zinnia angustifolia</i>	Sun	8-12	6-8; low, spreading growth habit	Bedding; Hanging baskets; Edging	Outstanding performance; Long blooming season; Flowers in white, yellow and gold
Profusion Zinnias <i>Zinnia hybrid</i>	Sun	8	10-12	Bedding; Edging	Hybrid between <i>Z. elegans</i> and <i>Z. angustifolia</i> ; Highly recommended for summer-long blooms – orange, white, rose, apricot and red

Plants marked * are tender perennials.



Cool-season Bedding Plants

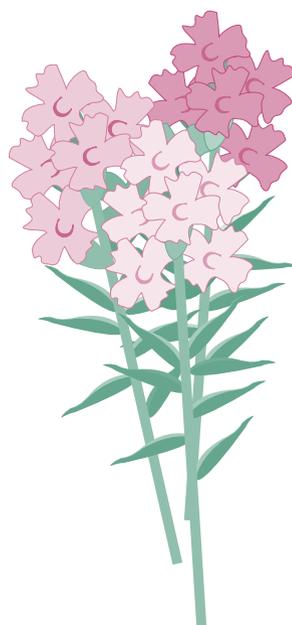
Name	Light	Spacing Inches	Height Inches	Cold Tolerance	Use	Comments
Alyssum <i>Lobularia maritime</i>	Sun or Shade	6-8	3-6	Hardy	Edging; Containers	Low growing plants; flowers white, purple, pink
Bluebonnets <i>Lupinus texensis</i>	Sun	12	12	Hardy	Sunny, dry areas; Containers	Direct seed in fall; blue flowers in spring
Cornflower <i>Centaurea cyanus</i>	Sun to Part Shade	8-12	14-30	Hardy	Bedding	Cut flower; Dried flower. Direct seed in fall or transplant in spring; blue, pink, white flowers
Dusty Miller <i>Senecio cineraria</i>	Sun	8-12	8-15	Hardy	Bedding; Containers	Excellent silvery foliage; drought tolerant
Foxglove <i>Digitalis purpurea</i>	Sun to Shade	12-16	20-36	Hardy	Bedding; Back-ground; Cut flower	Spikes of bell-shaped flowers in spring or early summer; Plant transplants Nov to March
Geranium <i>Pelargonium hortorum</i>	Sun to Part Shade	10-12	12-24	Hardy to 20 degrees	Bedding; Containers	Round flower heads in red, pink, white
Larkspur <i>Consolida ambigua</i>	Sun	8-10	24-36	Hardy	Bedding; Cut flowers	Direct seed in fall; Spikes of pink, blue, white, rose flowers in spring.
Lobelia <i>Lobelia erinus</i>	Sun to Shade	4-6	4-6	Hardy to mid 20s	Edging; Bedding; Containers; Hanging baskets	Not as hardy as most; Flowers dark blue, light blue, pink, rose, white.
Nasturtium <i>Tropaeolum majus</i>	Sun	8-15	8-12	Damaged by temperatures below 30; best used in fall or spring	Cut flowers; Edible flowers and leaves	Flowers orange red, orange, yellow, gold; Old-fashioned types spread; Not hardy
Nicotiana, Flowering Tobacco <i>Nicotiana glauca</i>	Sun to Shade	12-18	15-30	Hardy	Bedding; Cut flower; Fragrance; Hummingbirds	Flowers in white, pink, dark rose, lavender, purple

Cool-season Bedding Plants

Name	Light	Spacing Inches	Height Inches	Cold Tolerance	Use	Comments
Pansy <i>Viola x wittrockiana</i>	Sun to Part Shade	8-10	4-8	Very Hardy	Edging; Bedding; Containers	Very reliable and popular; flowers from fall to spring in many colors
Phlox <i>Phlox drummondii</i>	Sun	8-10	10-15	Hardy	Bedding; Containers	Spring flowers in red, purple, white, pale yellow, pink
Petunia <i>Petunia hybrida</i>	Sun to Shade	10-12	10-18	Hardy to 20 degrees	Bedding; Planters; Baskets	Plant in fall in S. Louisiana; flowers in many colors
Pinks, Dianthus <i>Dianthus chinensis</i>	Sun	8-12	12-18	Very Hardy	Bedding; Cut flowers; Fragrance	Reliable; blooms fall to early summer; red, pink, white, purple
Poppy, various types <i>Papaver species</i>	Sun	8-12	18-30	Hardy	Background; Bedding; Cut flowers	Direct seed in the fall; Various types include: Shirley, Iceland, California, Peony-flowered
Pot Marigold <i>Calendula officinalis</i>	Sun	8-10	10-24	Hardy	Cut flowers; Bedding	Flowers in shades of yellow, gold and orange; petals are edible.
Snapdragon <i>Antirrhinum majus</i>	Sun	8-10	12-36	Very hardy	Bedding, Cut flowers	Bloom poorly in winter but put on a grand show in spring; cut faded spikes for more flowers; many colors
Statice <i>Limonium sinuatum</i>	Sun	8-12	12-24	Hardy	Bedding; Cut flowers; Excellent dried flower	Many colors, including blue, purple, pink, yellow, white
Strawflower <i>Helichrysum bracteatum</i>	Sun	8-12	12-24	Hardy	Bedding; Cut flowers; Excellent dried flowers	Cut flowers before fully open to dry; Many colors
Stock <i>Matthiola incana</i>	Sun	8-12	15-30	Hardy	Cut flowers; Fragrance	One of the most fragrant bedding plants; flowers in spikes, burgundy, pink, white, purple

Cool-season Bedding Plants

Name	Light	Spacing Inches	Height Inches	Cold Tolerance	Use	Comments
Sweet Pea <i>Lathyrus odoratus</i>	Sun	6	Vine	Hardy	Vine; Fragrance; Cut flowers	Provide support for vine; flowers in shades of red, blue, purple, white
Toadflax <i>Linaria species/</i> hybrids	Sun to Part Shade	8	12-24	Hardy	Bedding; Back-ground; Cutting; Containers	Direct seed in fall; blooms in spring in a wide array of colors
Viola, Johnny-Jump-Up <i>Viola cornuta;</i> <i>V. tricolor</i>	Sun to Part Shade	8	6-8	Very Hardy	Edging; Bedding; Containers	Very reliable; blooms from fall to spring; similar to pansies but flowers are smaller.





Visit our Web site:
www.lsuagcenter.com

Authors:

Dan Gill, Associate Professor (Horticulture)
Allen D. Owings, Professor (Horticulture)
School of Plant, Environmental and Soil Sciences

Louisiana State University Agricultural Center

William B. Richardson, Chancellor

Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station

David J. Boethel, Vice Chancellor and Director

Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service

Paul D. Coreil, Vice Chancellor and Director

Pub. 2747

(10M)

3/07 Rev.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. The Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.