



# ***Flower Gardening Basics***

Flower gardening is a rewarding and popular hobby that anyone can enjoy. It combines the enjoyment of cultivating plants and watching them grow, with the pleasure and beauty of new flowers bursting into bloom each day.

## **CLIMATE & HARDINESS**

East Idaho is blessed with a climate that is both wonderful and challenging for the flower gardener. Because our winters tend to be long and cold we appreciate the flowers of spring and summer even more. The challenge lies in being able to squeeze a lengthy season of color out of our short growing season.

Perennials and many annual flowers are hardy enough to be planted in early April when frosts are still common. But many other annuals can be damaged with the slightest frost so planting must wait until late May or early June. (See our flyer "*Annual Flower Hardiness*" for a list of hardiness and planting times.)

## **PREPARING THE PLANTING BED**

Soils in our area tend to be alkaline (typically 7.5 to 8.5 pH) and very low in organic matter. Flowers grow best in slightly alkaline (pH 6 to 7) soils that are high in organic matter. So be sure to liberally amend the soil with humus producing organic matter such as compost, manure, bark dust, peat moss, etc. It is also a good idea to add sulfur to the soil to bring the pH down.

## **PLANNING A FLOWER GARDEN**

A flower garden can be anything from a few containers on the patio to a large bed with many varieties planted in distinct, well-planned patterns that create a specific design. Flower gardens can take on a wild meadow look, or a formal orderly appearance. Experiment. Look through magazines and the Internet for ideas. Be observant of others' yards as you drive around town. Here are some things to keep in mind as you choose which flowers to use in your garden.

- **Shade or sun tolerance**
- **Height**
- **Habit**
- **Bloom season**
- **Color**
- **Frost tolerance**
- **Annual or perennial**

## **ANNUALS Vs. PERENNIALS**

Annuals are flowers that complete their life cycle in one season. They do not come back the second year unless they reseed themselves. Perennials, on the other hand will often come back year after year. There is no rule that says you can't plant annuals and perennials together. For a striking mass of color, annuals are usually the best choice. They typically bloom from late June until fall frost. Perennials usually have a specific blooming season. It could be very early in the spring, mid summer, or late in the fall. A few bloom most of the summer or come in and out of bloom through the season.

## **BULBS**

Many times we forget about bulbs when we are planning our flower garden. Some bulbs are hardy (tulips, daffodils, crocus) and can be left in year-round. Others are tender (begonia, dahlia, gladiola) and must be dug up and stored in a cool place indoors for the winter. Generally speaking, the hardy bulbs are planted in September and October and the tender bulbs are planted in April and May.

## **BUYING PLANTS**

Selecting well-grown transplants contributes to the success of the garden, and quality should not be sacrificed in favor of price. The plants should be short, sturdy, and with foliage to the base. Those with yellowish foliage or bare stems should be avoided because they have been growing too long in the transplant container and are likely to be root-bound and slow to begin growth.

## **TRANSPLANTING TO THE GARDEN**

If possible, an overcast day or early evening should be selected for transplanting to lessen shock. Water plants before removing them from the pack or pot. After planting, water thoroughly. This will assure full soil contact with the roots and provide maximum soil moisture to prevent shock.

## **MAINTAINING THE GARDEN**

Fertilizing is very important in maintaining a colorful flower garden. This can be done with organic fertilizers such as manure, bone meal, blood meal, and cottonseed meal; or with chemical fertilizers that may be applied as liquids or granules, including time-release granules that feed for the entire season.

Weed control is essential for a successful flower garden. Flowers will have slower plant growth, due to the competition of the weeds for water, nutrients, and light. Weeding is best done by hand when the weeds are small. Organic mulches are a great help in preventing weeds, and in conserving water. Chemical herbicides are available for extreme cases and noxious weeds.

## **REAPING THE REWARDS**

Now you can kick back (in between time spent watering and weeding) and enjoy your backyard paradise. Nothing brings peace to our stress-filled world like pattering and relaxing in our own backyard filled with the beautiful, colorful flowers.

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