

## Planting Annuals

Annuals are defined as plants that complete their life cycle from seed to fruit to death within one growing season. They can perk up a landscape or garden to provide eye-catching color and interest. No matter how well you plan or how good the quality of the plants, you will not succeed without a good foundation and a good home for roots: a well-prepared soil.

Basically, the soil is a rooting medium and a storehouse for nutrients and water. It is imperative that the roots fully utilize the soil so that plants not only obtain nutrients, but also root deeply enough to reduce water stress.

Most annuals will grow very well in soils with a pH between 6.5-7.5. Because most of our soils fall within this range there should be no cause for drastic pH adjustments. If improper pH is a concern, then you should have your soil analyzed by a certified soil testing lab. Obtain your soil testing kit from your local Agricultural Extension Service. After results are received, an informed decision can be made as to the best course of action. Before blaming fertility or pH problems for poor annual performance, be sure you have spent adequate time in soil preparation. That is the key to quality plant growth.



Prior to planting, it is necessary to prepare the soil. All gardens benefit from the incorporation of organic matter to help improve soil texture, structure, aeration and drainage. Apply materials such as peat, compost, leaves, grass clippings, and manure. This will mean adding approximately 3-4 inches of organic matter tilled into the top 6-8 inches of soil. Think of your annual bed as a large growing container that has good drainage with plenty of aeration and nutrients. After thoroughly working all of the material into the bed, rake the area level and you are ready to plant.

Always work soils that are of the proper moisture content. Working soils too soon in the spring when they are still wet will result in damage to the soil structure. These soils become hard, poorly drained and inadequately aerated. Test before you dig by taking some soil and squeezing it into a ball in your hand. Touch the ball, if it crumbles readily the soil is safe to work. If it remains in a tight ball, it is too wet and you should not work it until it has a chance to dry out further.

At planting, break apart soil root masses slightly to prevent "root balling." This procedure will ensure rapid root expansion into surrounding soil. Fertilize using a specially formulated product such as ColorStar® or Osmocote®. Water plants after planting to hasten root establishment, then apply mulch to cover the soil and retain moisture.