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Growing Great Flowers



There are three elements necessary to ensure you have the best-looking flowers in your neighborhood. The first is to choose the annuals or perennials that thrive in the conditions you have, whether it's shade or sun, moist or dry soil.

The second is your planting technique. Take great care at planting time because properly-planted flowers perform much better than those that are set in the ground incorrectly. Some tips on proper planting are:

■Water your seedlings thoroughly several hours before setting them into their permanent locations. The ground should be damp but not wet. The best way to achieve this is to water the area the day before planting.

■Gently squeeze the bottoms of plastic cell packs to remove the seedling. Or, if you're using flats, pull the plants apart carefully.

■Space the plants as recommended on the label. Crowded plants don't usually grow well, and they are also more subject to disease—especially fungi. Proper spacing doesn't mean your plants have to be placed in perfectly straight rows. Be creative.

■The plants will adapt to their new home more quickly if they are replanted at the same level they were grown before. You should then

Fertilizer can also help make your flowers more beautiful.

firm the soil around the stem and water gently but thoroughly.

■If you have time to plant in the evening or on an overcast day, your plants will benefit from doing so. This gives the plants a chance to adjust to their new homes without being forced to face the drying sun.

■If the weather is too warm, you should provide some shading from the sun for the first few days. You'll also need to water lightly every day because the root systems are still immature and require moisture quite frequently.

■Mulching the flowers with about two inches of organic matter after planting helps to eliminate most weeds and also keeps moisture in the soil.

The third key element in growing successful flowers is water and food. Water and food can mean the difference between good flowers and great flowers. Water weekly if rainfall falls below an inch accumulation. Always water at ground level

since some plants (such as dahlias and zinnias) develop mildew on the foliage when wet.

Fertilizer can also help make your flowers more beautiful. Work some granular fertilizer into the soil before planting. Then feed your annuals once or twice a month from then on. Commercial fertilizer which is sold in a bag or box lasts longer in the soil than liquid fertilizers. Liquids, however, are easier to use.

If you do choose to use a liquid fertilizer, apply it every two weeks. Granular fertilizer should be applied at soil level once a month. You should make sure you keep it from coming into contact with any part of the plant to prevent burns to the leaves.

If your garden is in direct sunlight, you have many choices of sun-loving flowers which will be successful in this type of environment. Here are some recommended by the Professional Plant Growers Association: Ageratum, Alyssum, Aster, Balsam, Calendula, Celosia, Cleome, Coreopsis, Cornflower, Cosmos, Dahlia, Dianthus, Dusty Miller, Gaillardia (perennial), Geranium, Gloriosa daisy (perennial), Lantana, Lisianthus, Marigolds, Nasturtium, Nicotiana, Petunia, Phlox, Salvia, Snapdragon, Stock, Verbena, Vinca (Periwinkle), Zinnia.

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