



MISSION: BEAUTIFICATION ... CONSERVATION ... EDUCATION

Planting and Nurturing

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Landscape Design: Suzanne Finger, Editor

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Landscape Design: July, October, December, April – Suzanne Finger, Editor

An Annual Event!



Noisy flocks of robins and red-winged blackbirds passing through our backyard serve as a fun reminder that Spring is just around the corner. If you are like me, you are ready to clean out the old pots and freshen up the yard with some bright, cheerful annual beds!

In this issue of Planting and Nurturing, I would like to discuss some hard-working annuals for each season, as well as planting tips to make adding these colorful garden accessories an easy, breezy treat.

The Basics

What lipstick does for our faces, annuals do for our landscapes. They add that punch of color that livens up everything and turns ordinary into extraordinary. Annuals are akin to accessories to an outfit. They can make it or break it. By following a few simple rules of thumb, you can wield the power of annuals like a pro in your landscape.

First, maximize the impact by selecting the **right location**. You can't beat flanking the front door with the color of annuals to create a welcoming approach to your home. Two small annual beds on either side of your front walk, at the base of the front steps (if you have them) are ideal. It is important to note that you do not need a big annual bed to make a big impact.

Next, think over the sun or shade your selected location experiences. Be sure to choose annuals with sun/shade requirements that match your location. Finally, pick a **color** that complements your house's color and the other colors in your landscape. There is no exception to this. If those neon pink petunias start calling your name at the garden center and your house is orange brick, Don't Do It! Remember, every color looks lovely in the garden center display

but may not contribute to your home's color scheme. If you fear you will get weak-kneed as you waltz through the colorful rows of flowers at the garden center and lose self-control, I suggest you carry a photo of your house with you and consult the photo before choosing.

Another garden center trap that I should mention is the lovely collection of color mixes. Annuals mixed in delightful pastels or jewel tones make you swoon when neatly displayed in rows at the store, but color mixes do not give the same visual impact as solids for bed plantings (Pots are different, and we will discuss that later). Visual impact is the goal with annuals, and solid colors will always outperform the mixes in that arena. An accent color adjacent to white can be effective, but not all mixed together.

White is almost always safe and is a personal favorite. White blossoms also have the secret power of showing up well at night. If you like to host garden parties in the evening, Your white flowers around the back patio will show up in even the dimmest light. Classic red is the most welcoming color to have at your entrance and guarantees the most impact. Never underestimate the power of those potted red geraniums at your front door!



Above: Be sure to select just one color for more impact.

The Fun Part

Now, we get to play in the dirt. With this easy method of planting an annual bed, you will want to mask up and run to the garden center right away. This no-till method will have you putting annual beds everywhere, perhaps even in the neighbors' yard!



Above: Clear away mulch and grass exposing bare dirt to begin

When you decide on your annual bed location, rake back all of the mulch or remove grass to expose bare dirt. Purchase a good quality potting mix, preferably one with moisture control. Cut a big "X" in the top of the bag and turn it over to dump it directly in the bed area that you have cleaned of mulch and grass. **Do not turn the potting mix into the soil.** You do not even have to worry if the underlying soil is compacted. Your goal is to have about 4 inches of potting mix on top of the existing soil. Gently pat around the edges of the mound of potting mix to hold the sides in place.



Now you are ready to plant! This rich, soft soil makes it easy to take a gloved hand and form a perfect hole with your fingers. If your annuals are in a little six-pack, it only takes two fingers to make the hole! No need for a trowel. You can have two flats of lovely annuals planted in about 30 minutes.

Plant the annuals close together (with only about 3 to 4 inches of bare potting mix visible between), so they will cover quickly. Do not mulch the area and watch how the plants' little feeder roots spread into this juicy soil and knit together faster than you can say, "Bless your heart!"



Above: White Wave Petunias with a small accent of Pink Wave Petunias planted in the annual beds at my front door.

Pretty Petunias

It is hard to beat Petunias for a seasonal show of color. They are perfect for an early Spring planting that will perform until late Summer. They mass together in annual beds and fill and spill over planters for a dramatic effect. Petunias perform well in our heat and humidity and come in a delightful kaleidoscope of colors: endless pinks, purples, reds, cheery yellows, and even black (not sure how I would use this). If you pluck the spent blossoms, they will reward you with even more blooms!

Big on Begonias

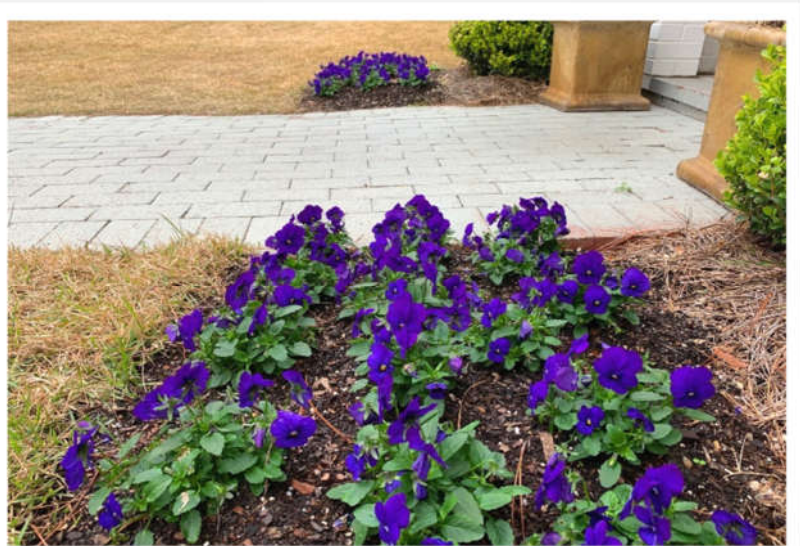
Red begonias are also a powerhouse for color and heartiness when planting in the late Spring. Once I even trimmed mine when they were leggy late in the season, and they bushed out again and provided blossoms until Christmas! Both the red and white blooms can be showy, and both also come with bronze or green leaves. Be sure to check sun/shade requirements because some begonias prefer a little shade in the hottest part of the day.

Mums and Marigolds

I must mention mums and marigolds, for Fall wouldn't be the same without them. I plant marigolds in the method described above; however, mums do well when left in the pot, even if you are putting them in a planting bed (Yes, I bury the pot).

The Mighty Viola

I have always had a soft spot for violas (Johnny Jump-ups). My husband's grandmother was named Viola, and she personified this lovely but tough, hard-working beauty. Planted in the early Fall, these jewels in blues, violet, yellow or white perform well through our southern winters and usher our landscapes into early Spring. Pansies, hearty like their kin viola, have larger faces and more color options; however, they tend to fizzle out a little sooner than the viola.



Above: These violas were planted just after Christmas and I expect them to continue to greet the mailman to my front porch well into Spring.

The Elusive Purselane

Lured by its lovely little blossom, I was convinced to give these succulents a ride home from Lowes one afternoon. They wanted a shot at my front annual beds, and I decided to give them a chance. Little did I know, they had a dirty little secret up their sleeves. They would only open their pretty faces when the sun and temperature were just right. Any other time, they slept on the job. So much for the show of color at my front door. They won't catch a ride home with me again! I've also learned that Purselane can be invasive.



Above: Purselane with blossoms closed



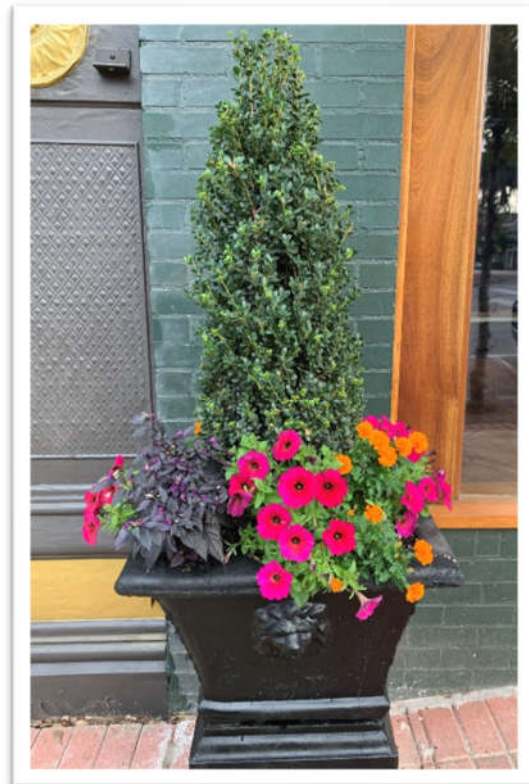
Above: Purselane with blossoms open

Pretty in Pots

Pots provide an easy way to show off the season's best annuals. You can doctor the soil perfectly for each plant you want to showcase, and you can easily change out plants with the seasons.

Here are a few ideas to incorporate annuals into your landscape. Placing an evergreen shrub such as a boxwood or crenata holly in the center of a pot or container creates a year-round backdrop for seasonal annuals. The dark green background allows brightly colored annuals to steal the show. Color mixes are welcome in pots, as long as they complement each other and your home. You can even go as far as coordinating the colors of the annuals with the rooms' interior colors from which you view the pots!

Right: Petunias, marigolds and an ornamental pepper create a vibrant skirt of color around this 'Sky-Pencil' Holly in planters that flank our office.



Pot Inspirations

Pretty Pots for Spring or Summer!

*For a pot that's
pretty in pink
try...*

Pink and White
Geraniums

Pink Petunias

Creeping Jenny



Pretty Pots for Summer!

*For a cheerful
color combination
try...*

Blue Salvia

Yellow Marigolds

White Petunias



All Photos By Suzanne Finger