



WARM WEATHER FLOWER GARDENING

STARNOTE 310
October 2013

Bright colors from Spring to Fall

As the weather warms and cool season flowers fade, it's time to think about summer and flower varieties that will produce in desert heat and hot, dry winds. In terms of seasonal color, our climate has two basic planting seasons- -spring and fall. The first produces color from spring through early fall; the second covers late fall through early spring.

Crossover flowers produce all year and are few and far between. We'll discuss them briefly. Perennial varieties are also a good bet and do a good job of supplementing annual plantings. See StarNote 300, *Reliable Perennial Flowers*, for a discussion of popular varieties. Due to temperature extremes, some perennials are grown as annual color in our climate. In cooler summers or milder winters, some varieties may be viable for a second year. Proper fertilizing, cultivating and watering can extend the blooming periods of many annuals as well.

From seed or nursery transplants, in the yard, in containers or hanging baskets, flowers brighten our property and add to pride of ownership. How do you plant warm season flowers? Finding a spot with sunshine that you can also get a shovel into is a great start! Most of the colorful blooming flowers have much more tender roots than trees and shrubs. So, it is important that the soil you plant into is good. Often Native soil is so poor it is difficult to use for planting these. In this case, use Peat Moss or Filthy Rich Potting soil to surround the plants. Make the holes extra wide so the roots can spread out.

Simply choose the right variety, the correct location, improve the soil with organic matter like *Paydirt™ Planting Mix* and add a starter fertilizer like *Dr. Q's® Gold Dust*, plant, water, fertilize regularly and enjoy!

FAVORITE SEASONAL “Annual” VARIETIES:

Alyssum is a low, bushy, spreading plant covered with small fragrant flowers in shades of white, pink or purple. They self sow readily and re-sprout in spring. Excellent in borders or mass plantings. Be sure you want them where you put them!

Begonia makes a colorful addition to any shady garden area. Bronze or shiny green, semi-succulent foliage is highlighted with delicate flowers in white, pink or red. Good in containers. Variety *New Guinea* is taller and bushier with larger flowers. Be sure this one has excellent drainage.

Buddy Purple has papery purple flower heads atop compact bushy foliage. Good for edging, beds or pots. Cut flowers are excellent in dried arrangements.

Celosia gives bright garden color in the hottest weather. *New Look* has purplish red foliage and feathery, deep red flower spikes. *Plume Celosia* has green foliage with feathery flower spikes in shades of yellow, pink and red. Makes an excellent full sun accent, border or background. Groom as needed to keep neat.

Cosmos is a delicate, fernlike plant with large, bright daisy-like flowers in shades of pink, purple, white, or lavender. It frequently reaches 3 feet in height and makes a good background or accent. Plants self-sow freely.

Impatiens give delicate color to shady areas, patio containers, atriums and entryways. Succulent stems bear flowers in a wide variety of colors. Needs good garden soil and excellent drainage.

Lobelia makes an excellent trailing plant for shady containers, window boxes and hanging baskets. In shady gardens it makes a nice, compact accent or border. In varieties like *Cambridge Blue* and *Crystal Palace*, rich blue flowers contrast with bright green or bronzy green leaves. Other varieties may be pure white, pink or blue with a white eye.

Marigold comes in an endless variety of colors and sizes. From dwarf to giant, in colors of bright yellow, orange and red, this plant has always been a favorite of gardeners in the southwest. Equally at home in containers or gardens, it self sows readily. It's great in full sun and better without overhead water.

Petunias are marked by large, trumpet shaped flowers on compact, bushy plants. Shades range from pure white through purple, pink, red and bicolor. Some varieties are sweetly fragrant. Excellent in massed plantings, spring and fall; needs afternoon shade in summer to look good. May carry over in mild winters.

Vinca is a showy, glossy green, heat-loving plant with flowers in unusual shades of grape, raspberry, blue, red, rose, white and bicolor. Excellent in masses, as borders or spot accents. Avoid overhead sprinkling. May return from seed next year.

Zinnia makes a spectacular addition to any summer garden. Ranging in size from dwarf to 3 feet or more, this heat lover produces flowers in nearly every shade imaginable. Good in pots; remove spent flowers to encourage repeat blooming. Avoid overhead sprinkling.

YEAR-ROUND “Perennial” FAVORITES:

Carnation. Very hardy, takes full sun – needs no protection in winter. Garden varieties, normally seen as bushy, compact dwarfs, thrive under routine care. Shades range from scarlet through pink to white. Some are sweetly fragrant.

Dianthus is a member of the carnation family that makes perfect mounds of color in spring and fall. Blooms off and on throughout the rest of the year. Shows nearly endless color varieties from deep red through pink, purple, white and bicolor. Will also grow well in part shade. Plant anywhere in the garden.

Dusty Miller is highly favored for its soft, silvery gray foliage. It's excellent for formal borders and accents in traditional or desert gardens. Stalks of mustard-yellow flowers appear in summer. Remove them to keep the plant vigorous.

Gazania is a bright, cheery, heat-loving plant available in trailing or clumping varieties. Trailing types make excellent ground covers while clumping plants are perfect for spot accents, masses or borders. Colors range from white to burgundy, yellow, orange, red and bicolor. Don't over water this one!

Lantana is one of the most versatile, colorful plants available for our climate. Varieties include trailing, mounding and bush with shades of purple, orange, yellow, red and multicolor. Use it as a ground cover, accent, border or clipped, low hedge. Some varieties like *Purple Trailing* and *New Gold* may regrow year after year.

Pentas (Star Flower) are wonderful, spreading, multi stemmed perennials grown as annuals in our climate. Compact plants are continually covered with clusters of white, pink, lilac or red flowers. Superb as borders, masses or accents. Takes overhead watering better than most bedding plants.

Snapdragon is available in many colors and sizes. Dwarf varieties are excellent for masses, foregrounds and borders. Taller varieties work well as background and accent plantings. All do well in containers. Self sows readily and produces endless color variations due to cross pollination.

HANDY WARM WEATHER TIPS:

Avoid Overhead Sprinkling to prevent distorted blossoms and disease problems. Large-leafed plants may shed the water leading to dry root balls.

Good drainage is important. Soggy soil means root suffocation, root rot and death to your plants!

Fertilize regularly throughout the season. Scatter *Dr. Q's® Rose & Flower Food* around your plants monthly to promote continuous blooming.

Mulch the soil surface to conserve moisture and cool plant roots in the hot summer months.

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