



An annual is a plant that completes its growing cycle in a single season. That is, it grows from seed, flowers and produces its own seeds through spring/summer or autumn/winter. When you think about it, that is a whole lot of living over a short time!

What I love about annuals is their versatility and endless options for colour, shape, form, size and textures. There is an annual to suit any situation and fill every gap in the garden. No other plants have the same long-flowering ability to provide such brilliant displays. Did I mention colour? Colour is a great way to create a theme, establish continuity or just add a splash of something special through the garden and pots. Annuals provide so many colours. They are brilliant for highlighting areas of interest like entranceways and other focal points.



Did you know that some of the annuals we sell in our bedding range are actually perennials? The reason we treat them as annuals is they often will not tolerate winter cold. Plants like salvia, verbena and even impatiens in their homeland will continue through for another summer season.

You can either grow annuals from seed or buy them in seedling packs. Growing them from seed means more work and it takes longer but it is economical. You get far more plants for your dollar from seeds than when you buy a punnet of seedlings. Some people get great satisfaction being able to grow and produce something from a seed. To get the most from your annuals plant your seed about 8–10 weeks before you want to put your plants in the garden. Check the back of your seed packet for the length of time from sown seed to planting out, as this can vary depending on the variety you choose.

Sow seed into trays using a seed raising mix. It is important to use a good seed raising mix that has the right balance of fertilisers, peat and fine bark that will allow the seed's tender roots to grow into the mix. There is an expanded clay ore called vermiculite that is a great lightweight medium that you can use to cover the seed. Due to its light weight, it allows the seed's first stem to grow through it easily, but more importantly vermiculite allows wettability of seedlings and turns white when seeds are drying out, which makes it a good wet/dry indicator and helps you to know when to water your plants. As a rule of thumb remember when covering seed with vermiculite or seed raising mix to cover the seed to the depth of twice the diameter of the seed. Many people sow the seed too deep so the seed doesn't germinate because it runs out of energy on its way to the sunlight.

The first couple of leaves of a seedling are often not 'true' leaves. They are actually the cotyledons that become the embryonic first leaves. Once more leaves grow (the 'true' leaves) and the seedlings look strong enough, you can transplant them into your prepared beds or containers.

Soil preparation is the key to success with annuals. Think of it as the foundation for the plants. Compost, blood and bone, sheep pellets and a good slow-release fertiliser all give the sustenance these quick-growing gems need for optimum performance. I always try to prepare my beds a week or two before planting by



digging in a couple of bags of compost and a bag of blood and bone. A month after planting I apply some Oderings 'Garden Replenish'; it is one of the best slow-release fertiliser we stock. I always get flowers within six weeks of planting, plus an extended season.

If you like instant gratification you can buy annuals as seedlings in a punnet or for larger areas buy a boxlot that gives great value for money. We have such a fantastic range of annual seedlings that the hardest part is choosing what to plant. Make sure you choose varieties that suit the areas you are planting in: sun or shade, damp or dry, short or tall. (It is important to grow short ones in a windy spot.) If you are unsure what to choose any of our staff would love to discuss the options with you, both in terms of your planting area and your desired colour schemes.

When transplanting try to prevent too much root disturbance by digging plants out with a fork or gently tipping them out of the container. It is easier to separate the plants and place them out where you want them before planting. This way you get a far more even display and you can get the spacing right.





To plant make your hole and place your plant into the hole so that half the roots are still above ground level. Then firm in by pushing gently down, and cover the roots with a little more soil if needed.

Once planted, watering is important. Even if the soil is moist when you plant, you should still water the little plants immediately after you have planted them. Drying out is a common danger, because annuals often have a shallow root system. They need regular watering, but be careful not to overwater. The best way to check the need for watering is to scratch just under the surface of the soil; if it is dry 2–3cm down, you should water. High-pressure water can undermine the roots leaving them exposed to sunlight, so water carefully and often until established.

As I am sure you already know, annuals are not only great in the garden but they are fantastic in pots and containers. You can have bold solid colour or a mixture of colours and textures with tall, medium and trailing varieties. The combinations are endless so have fun designing your own personal displays. Perhaps the best thing about a display of annuals is that you can grow different ones next season, so there is no need to be bored.



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