

## **TIPS ON GARDENING WITH ANNUALS IN NEWFOUNDLAND**

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### **What is an Annual?**

An annual is a plant which completes its life cycle in one season (that is, it germinates, grows, flowers and sets seeds all in one growing season). At the end of the year the plant then dies. Tender perennials such as snapdragons, China pinks, fuchsia, geraniums and gazania are often grown as annuals in northern climates.

Annuals are perhaps the most popular plants used by the home gardener. They are versatile, they can be used in almost any garden and they are available in a wide range of sizes, forms and colors.

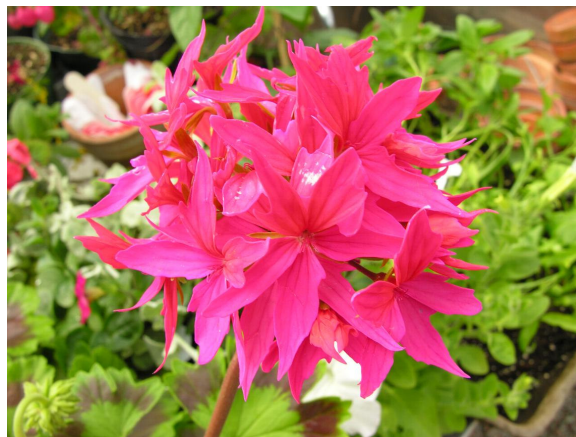
### **Annuals v. Perennials**

While perennials often take several years to settle down and bloom, annuals are ideal in a new garden. Planting annuals with perennials will provide much-needed color while the perennials are becoming established.

Annuals can be used to not only fill spaces in an established perennial border, but can provide colour when the perennials are between blooms.

While perennials are a poor choice for planters such as large tubs, pots or window boxes, annuals are ideal for these situations. Since they are available in such a wide range, you can mix and match every year so that a planter never looks the same twice.

Annuals are usually cheaper than perennials and most bloom all season.



Fuchsia and geraniums are tender perennials commonly grown as annuals in our region.

## **Growing Requirements**

All annuals do not grow under the same light conditions. While most annuals prefer full sun, some grow better in light shade. Very few will grow in dense shade. Therefore, when choosing your annuals you must keep your growing area in mind.

Generally, most annuals will prefer a moist, well-drained soil. Garden loam can be amended with peat, old compost, leaf mould or old manure. Certain annuals will actually grow better in poor, dry soils. Nasturtiums and portulaca fall into this category.

## **Tips for Purchasing Annuals**

Ensure plants are stocky, compact and a healthy green colour. Spindly, yellowish growth is a sign of stress. Do not buy such plants as they are often permanently set-back. Height is not an indication of a better plant.

Ask if the plants have been hardened off. All plants need to be hardened off before planting outside (for more info on hardening-off refer to the 'Transplanting' section).

Resist the temptation to buy annuals already in flower even though this gives an "instant garden" effect. Flowering plants do not transplant as well as those just coming into bud.

Examine plants to ensure they are free of pests and diseases. Often, crowding plants in their flats/cell-packs will cause poor air-circulation which results in the lower leaves being mouldy or rotten. Avoid buying such infected plants. Also check for infestations of aphids since many annuals are prone to these tiny green insects.

## Transplanting

Before transplanting, you need to harden-off your plants if the nursery has not already done so. This process will gradually acclimatize your plants to the rigours of outdoor life.

Initially, expose your plants to a couple of hours of outdoor conditions. Avoid exposing them to full sun for the first couple of days. As the week progresses, gradually increase their exposure to outside light conditions, including more direct sun (remember to expose them slowly to full sun or their leaves will scorch).

When your plants are outside they will dry out very quickly, so be sure to check the moisture levels regularly. If the weather is dry, they may require daily watering.

When you are ready to transplant, make sure the plants are well watered. If your plants are growing together in a flat, the best way to separate them is to use a sharp knife and cut between each plant as you would a cake, so that each plant has its own block of soil. This method will cut many roots, but new roots will quickly grow and help establish the new transplants. Plants in cell-packs need only be punched out of the cells.

***Never transplant on a hot sunny day!*** Remember to properly space the plants to ensure they spread to their full potential. Water well. A transplant fertilizer may be beneficial at this stage.

## Care and Maintenance

*Do not overwater!* Only during very dry periods do most annuals require extra watering. Too often, home gardeners water frequently but lightly. Such watering does little for the plants and actually encourages fungal diseases and slug activity. More frequent watering is required for the new transplants to become established.

To help maintain soil moisture, plants can be mulched with 2-5 cm of leaf mould or old compost. These mulching materials release nutrients for the plants as they decompose and they keep weeds down or make them easier to pull.

In contrast, annuals grown in containers may require daily watering. These plants are growing in a limited volume of soil and cannot draw upon moisture reserves in the ground. This is especially true if they are located in an exposed, windy location. The regular addition of water-soluble fertilizers will help keep container-grown annuals in good flowering condition.

For garden-grown plants, mix old compost/old manure or leaf mould into the ground and add bonemeal to the planting hole. Using organic sources of nutrients will prevent any over-fertilization or fertilizer burn, which sometimes occurs when chemical fertilizers are employed.

Deadheading, the process of removing old faded flowers, should be attended to regularly. This not only results in a tidier display of plants but also encourages greater flower production. If old flowers are not removed, the plant will direct its energy into seed production rather than flower production, hence the end of your floral display!

## **Pests & Diseases**

Slugs and snails are our most common pests here in Newfoundland and both can cause serious damage to annuals. Our prevalent damp weather is very conducive to slug activity. Slug bait is available from garden centres but ensure you following the application rates and procedures as recommended on the label. A shallow pan of stale beer placed around your plants will also work effectively (slugs are attracted to the beer and drown). If all else fails, you can physically remove them.

Aphids are another common pest of annuals. They suck the sap from plants causing their leaves to become yellowed, curled and stunted. A high population of ladybugs or lacewings, the natural predator of aphids, may keep their numbers in check.

Cutworm infestation can be controlled by placing a collar of cardboard around the base of the plant.

Mildew is a common disease often brought on after too much rain and/or poor air-circulation. Keeping plants well spaced will help reduce this disease.

## **Final Note**

The wise selection of proper annuals suitable for your particular growing conditions will make the difference between a good display of flowers and a poor one. Tall annuals are not the best choice for growing in open, exposed sites, nor are they good for containers. Only a select few annuals will grow in shade and none will thrive in dense shade. Even with regular dead-heading, some annuals have a short blooming period.

With the proper choice of annuals, you can be rewarded with constant flowers for at least the months of July through September. The choice of hardy annuals can extend this blooming period into October, at which time, you can replace the annuals with fall bulbs.