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GARDENING

Annual Flowers for Every Garden

by Kate Rogers Gessert

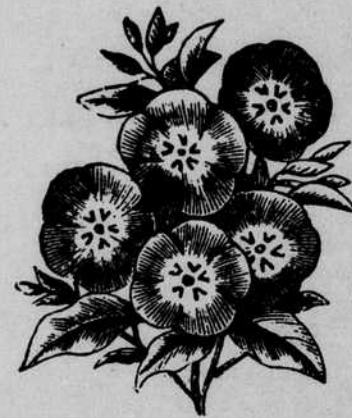
We've reached the part of spring when we can safely plant all sorts of annual flowers—those that tolerate cold, and those that need warm weather before they really take off. If warm-weather flowers are planted now, they will have a chance to get settled in and put on leaf and root growth before they begin blooming.

People who work in nurseries notice the largest crowds of customers on warm, sunny days. Many gardeners buy their flowers then and rush home to plant them while it's still "good" weather. However, "good" transplanting weather depends on who you are talking to—a person or a plant. Transplanting is a much less stressful process for plants when the weather is cool and cloudy, and light rain is best of all. Plant roots are often damaged in transplanting, even though you are very careful. On hot sunny days plants transpire heavily—lose water through their leaves—and when they can't replace the water sufficiently through their roots, they wilt.

Another important detail of transplanting is to water plants heavily, even if the soil is already quite wet, in order to get the soil settled close around plant roots.

Whenever you can, buy flower seedlings that are grown in individual pots, or well-spaced in a flat. A great many plants that are growing crowded close together are not a bargain—your only choices when transplanting them are to try to untangle plant clusters, ripping the roots apart in the process, or to plant groups of seedlings rather than individual plants.

In general, annual flowers are among the most colorful and widely-adapted garden plants. Many of them bloom happily in soil that is not especially fertile, as long as they are growing in sunny places. But within these general outlines, there are annual flowers that are adapted to many kinds of special growing situations.



Flower-Vegetable Gardens

I'm a strong advocate of growing vegetables and flowers together, but I admit not all flowers are at their best in the moist, fertile soil of vegetable gardens. Some flowers—nasturtiums are an extreme example—put on extra leafy growth under these conditions, and flower less abundantly. But many annual flowers are excellent companions for vegetables, and seem to grow and bloom their very best in the same soil conditions that vegetables need. These flowers include

marigolds, zinnias, snapdragons, salpiglossis, annual phlox, amaranthus (which also has edible leaves, delicious in stir fries), larkspur, lobelia, and three favorites of mine which are relatively unknown: lavatera, calliopsis, and anagallis.

Lavatera grows in round, two-foot bushes covered with silky-petalled pink or white flowers that resemble single hollyhock flowers. Although lavatera is closely related to hollyhocks, it seems to be immune to rust, the bane of many local hollyhocks.

Calliopsis, a bright wildflower from the North American prairies, has single or semi-double daisy flowers of yellow, gold, maroon, bronze, and deep red that have bands of contrasting colors across the petals, and purplish-brown centers. Calliopsis leaves are finely cut and bright green. Calliopsis is a beautiful, merry-looking companion for corn, squash, and blue salvia.

Blue anagallis is a close relative of scarlet pimpernel, a delicate Oregon weed/wildflower with star-shaped salmon-pink flowers. Blue anagallis grows in a small-leaved, upright bush that covers itself with one-inch star-shaped flowers of an amazingly intense dark, bright blue. It is small (12 inches) and splendid, outstanding for its flower color and in its graceful growth. It looks great with carrots, parsley and basil, especially small-leaved basil (parsley and basil are two herbs that are very well-suited to vegetable-garden conditions), and with other delicate flowers such as baby snapdragons (*Linaria*) and "Lulu" signet marigold.

Signet marigolds are being grown

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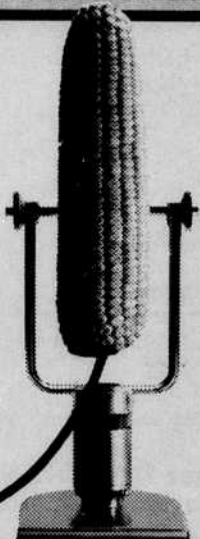
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