

Things have a way of working out, even if by accident. Such was the case with a planter at our church. Before I share with you our fortuitous discovery, I'd like to divulge a brief history.

A number of years ago, Rita and I volunteered to care for a large planter that graces the front of our church. The planter is made of concrete and brick and has a southern exposure. As a result, during the summer months, the soil in the planter becomes quite warm and dries out quickly.

It was autumn when we accepted the challenge. At the time, little was growing in the planter. Adding six inches of new, fertile garden soil to the planter was our first task. We then planted three hundred tulip bulbs. That following spring, and coinciding with Easter, the planter was ablaze with beautiful red tulips. Shortly thereafter, the beautiful red flowers vanished, giving rise to drab, dull, dying tulip foliage. We quickly agreed, more variety was needed.

We then planted perennial daylilies toward the back of the planter, a row of purple pom-pom mums in the middle and in the front we set out well over two hundred annual bedding petunias. Our goal was to achieve succession of bloom throughout the entire growing season.



Each spring thereafter, for about four or five more years, we replanted with petunias. Unfortunately, we were never totally thrilled with the results. By mid-to-late summer, the heat was too much for the petunias to thrive. They quickly fizzled. Furthermore, the chore of constantly dead heading became wearisome, and the watering seemed never ending. We realized it was time for a change.

Last spring, we substituted *Catharanthus roseus* for the petunias. Although I was familiar with this particular annual flower, never had I planted it. As a result, we were in for a pleasant surprise. I can now boast this annual plant has become one of Rita's and my favorite flowers.

While technically a tender perennial in USDA Zones 9 and 10, *Catharanthus roseus* is almost always grown as an annual. Its common name is rose periwinkle, or vinca. (Note: It should not be mistaken for *vinca minor*, the common perennial periwinkle used as an evergreen ground cover that grows well in the shade.)

Annual rose periwinkle loves the sun. It is not particular about soil quality. This



plant performs best in moist soil, yet tolerates hot dry soil. Throughout the entire growing season, it sports attractive shiny green leaves with a white rib down the middle, and large white, pink or magenta flowers, often with pink centers. At maturity it forms mounds of plants reaching heights and widths of one to two feet. There are two qualities of this annual flower I love. It blooms reliably all summer

long, and it is self-cleaning (**no-deadheading**)!

This spring we accidentally discovered another great quality. Shortly after setting out our new plants, we noticed that seeds of periwinkle from last year's fertilized flowers had dropped to the soil and were germinating into new



Sister Jo's two-year old potted Periwinkle

seedlings. As one can see from my photos, we now have two different colors of periwinkle flowers blooming. The deep rose-colored flowers are from the plants we planted this spring. The plants blooming light pink in color with a dark rose center are a result of the self-seeded plants. What a great bonus!

Interestingly, four weeks ago Rita and I visited my sister Jo and brother-in-law Loren, in San Tan Valley, Arizona. Sis had a

potted periwinkle that she's tended for the past two or three years —a prime example of this plant performing as a perennial in warmer USDA Zones.

Unfortunately, periwinkle has a low tolerance to frost. Early this fall, I plan to take a few cuttings of periwinkle before frost arrives. Periwinkle roots easily and also makes a great houseplant! We will also allow this year's plants to drop their seeds; hopefully, we will have more baby vincas germinate next spring.

Catharanthus roseus, rose periwinkle, vinca, is an excellent annual bedding plant, and I encourage my readers to give it a try. Our accidental discovery about this awesome little plant has certainly proved things do have a way of working out, and in our case— for the good!