

## June Care of Annual Flowers

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Release: June 3, 2024

May was planting season for annual flowers. Annuals are plants that live for one growing season only and they have a long blooming period. Here are some tips to promote abundant blooming up until frost.

After planting, the first goal is promoting root establishment to support blooming throughout summer. With annuals, removing blossoms at planting and for a week or two after is helpful. It allows a plants energy to be put towards root establishment rather than blooming and seed production.

Annual flowers of today are bred to flower early, even before they're planted outdoors, and for a longer period of time. It's a benefit because we can see flower shape and color when buying and enjoy blossoms sooner. But this makes removal of flowers immediately after planting more beneficial.

Correct watering is always important, especially for root growth. If you've read my articles in the past, you know this means not too little and not too much. Roots require about equal amounts of oxygen and water in soil. Try to keep soil uniformly moist to a depth of six to eight inches.

Overwatering is a larger problem than underwatering, especially during wet springs. We love our plants and may overindulge them. I see more plants suffer or die from overwatering than underwatering. Check soil first to be sure moisture is needed; then apply enough water to moisten but not saturate soil to the recommended depth.

While containers need frequent watering, they're easy to overwater. Annual flowers planted in containers may have struggled to get started due to heavy rainfall in May, especially if containers continued to be watered without first checking soil moisture and pots did not have drainage holes.

Use containers with drainage holes or create drainage holes if needed. Holes can be punched or drilled into container sides near the bottom after planting if needed. Do not use gravel in container bottoms. This does not make up for no drainage holes and creates a zone of saturation around plant roots. If you used gravel this year, be extra careful above overwatering.

Apply a fertilizer containing nitrogen about four weeks after annual flowers are planted. Providing nitrogen through the growing season promotes prolific blooming until frost. In a flower bed, spread fertilizer around plants and lightly scratch it into soil, then water to dilute it. Use the rate recommended for the fertilizer purchased. Repeat sidedressing about every four weeks.

For container annuals, apply a liquid fertilizer when watering once every two weeks. Because containers are watered more often, and it is important for excess water to drain out, nitrogen is leached more quickly. Avoid overfertilizing annuals with nitrogen as you many end up with beautiful lush plants but fewer blossoms. This is another practice where some tend to overindulge plants.

Throughout the season, remove spent flowers. Annuals focus energy on seed production. If old flowers are removed, energy is directed into producing more flowers. Annuals responding well to deadheading are petunias, marigolds, snapdragons, begonias, zinnias, salvia, and geraniums. Annuals that bloom well without deadheading are Vinca, Impatiens, Melampodium and Torenia.

Deadheading is easily done by pinching the flower stem or stalk off by hand or with a scissors. If you get behind, also look for seed structures to remove. The flower petals may be gone, but the seed structure may still be present. Seed production is what signals an annual it has done it's job for the year and can begin to cut back on flower production.