

## Spring Planting – Flowers

Sensible low maintenance gardens that look good in any season depend on a sound foundation of foliage. But it's flowers which really lift our spirits, especially when they first emerge after a long grey winter.

Flowers are like flings. Seductive, sometimes chosen in the heat of the moment, they don't stick around forever, often leaving us between seasons with a plant that's less than pretty, or worse - high maintenance. But still we persist. Because there'll always be another spring.

Although many flowering plants also have attractive foliage, it's become trendy in recent years to ban flowers altogether, in favour of tasteful layers of green. But what gardener has never been seduced by a flower? How boring life would be without flowers to highlight the seasons.

### **A summer border**

November is a great time to plant a vibrant flower border that will sizzle with colour right through till autumn. For sunshine yellows, punchy pinks, and hot oranges and reds that hold their own in the strong UV light, consider dahlias, cannas, *Rudbeckia*, *Helenium*, *Crocsmia*, sunflowers, *Solidago*, *Helianthus*, and *Cosmos*. Hot colours look even better interspersed with dashes of blue or purple. Ideal summer and autumn blues include *Aster*, *Ageratum*, *Brachycome*, petunia, *Penstemon*, English lavender and salvias.

In dry soils, plant drought tolerant flowers such as *Cistus* (rock rose), *Mesembryanthemum* (ice plant), *Sedum*, *Echinacea* (cone flower) and *Pelargonium* (geranium).

Choose a short list of favourites and go for group plantings and repetition, rather than planting one of everything. Include anchor plants with big bold leaves or solid silhouettes, such as flax or canna. Add ornamental grasses for extra texture.

The cheapest way to make a summer flower border is to sow seed. Quick and easy from seed are Californian poppy, cosmos, and nasturtium.

Prepare the soil carefully before planting and your border will survive much longer between watering. Dig in lots of compost and apply mulch after planting.

*Suggested Products: Living Earth Compost, Living Earth Mulch, Bark Mulch, Reharvest Coloured Mulch – available from Central Landscape Supplies in bags and bulk, pick up or delivery.*

### **Roses**

A vase of freshly picked roses more than compensates for any extra effort required in growing them.

Rose planting is traditionally done in winter, but container grown plants for spring planting are an increasing trend. Garden centres stock a limited selection of the most popular varieties. A more extensive range of varieties is available by mail order and online. However, it is important to remember that the strongest growing plant doesn't always lie behind the prettiest photograph. Take the time to check vigour and disease resistance.

Roses grow best in full sun. They thrive in any soil that supplies plenty of moisture without becoming water logged. Try not to plant new roses in soil previously inhabited by roses. Soil organisms, unfriendly to roses, build up causing a condition known as 'rose sickness'. If you wish to plant again in the same

position, replace it with soil from another part of the garden. Roses will also struggle if planted too close to trees which will rob them of light, moisture and nutrients. Finish off after planting with a generous layer of organic mulch to keep water in and weeds out.

*Suggested products: Screened Topsoil, Nutrasoil, Living Earth Mulch, Bark Mulch, Reharvest Coloured Mulch – available at Central Landscape Supplies in bags and bulk, pickup or delivery.*

Take the time to water roses as deeply as possible to encourage deep root growth. A light wetting of the soil surface will do more harm than good. Avoid sprinklers which increase the risk of disease. Fertiliser is best applied in spring, and again in late summer. Roses respond well to organic manures such as sheep pellets. Fresh animal manure must be composted before use.

Old fashioned roses which bloom in one great spring flush are pruned immediately after flowering. The main pruning time for repeat flowering modern roses is winter, but regular dead-heading throughout summer keeps flowers coming for longer.

Bugs start causing trouble in early summer. The more humid your climate the more likely you will need to spray. Systemic insecticides, such as Yates Confidor, are absorbed by the plant, thereby killing only the insects that are feeding on your roses. The number of times you need to spray is significantly less than with older style contact sprays.

Disease problems are significantly reduced by planting disease resistant varieties and focusing on healthy, well grown roses. Avoid overcrowding and excessive weed growth, and keep the ground clear of diseased leaves.

## **Pots**

If, in the interests of easy maintenance or fashionable austerity, you decide to banish flowers from your garden beds, you can always grow them in pots. This way, when the show is over they can be moved from view until you're ready to replant.

Repeating pots of the same colour throughout a garden creates real impact. For bold summer colour try petunias, geraniums, marigolds, zinnias, salvia for sun, or *Impatiens* for semi-shade. These summer stalwarts are available as 'potted colour', mature in-flower seedlings which transplant easily and offer instant rewards for an afternoons work. They'll last well into autumn if you regularly feed, water and snip of spent blooms. Also excellent for summer pots are the Colourwave petunias and verbenas.

If you want to grow roses in pots, choose the patio or shrub roses with a dense covering of small shiny leaves. Roses with smaller flowers and leaves are easier to trim and generally the most disease resistant. Those which have been grown on their own roots tend to grow better in pots than grafted plants because they have more fibrous feeding roots better able to seek out moisture and nutrients in the confined space of a pot.

Roses in containers need daily watering in dry summer weather. Avoid small shallow pots which dry out too quickly.

## **Success with summer pots**

- ✓ Choose tough dry tolerant plants which will survive the rigours of container life.
- ✓ Choose the right sized pot. Too small and it will dry out, too large and the excess potting mix may lead to root rot.
- ✓ Always use good quality container mix, appropriate for the plant.
- ✓ Use controlled-release fertiliser at potting time, and supplement with liquid feeding through spring and summer.
- ✓ Group pots together to slow down evaporation and simplify watering.
- ✓ Add water crystals for summer.

- ✓ Use a potting mix with a wetting agent or add this yourself. This increases the wettable area so that water spreads evenly rather than washing out the bottom.
- ✓ Position large heavy pots before you fill them.