Flowers for fall and winter color  
By Laura Murphy

Want to brighten up your fall and winter landscape? Do it with annual flowers! Nothing in the landscape can provide as much color, for as long a time, as can flowering annuals. Pansy, viola, and petunia are a few of the best for fall planting. They are frost resistant should we have a cold snap like last year and will flower throughout the cool season. Other good choices include: calendula, dwarf snapdragon, and stock. For shady spots you can grow geranium, fibrous rooted begonia, sweet alyssum, and lobelia.

If you live in a location that has colder than average winter temperatures, pick the warmer spots around your home to locate your annuals. South-facing walls and under east and west overhangs are generally the warmest locations. North walls are the coldest and shadiest.

Annual flowers look great in groupings near the front door, along walks, patios, or beside pools for a real splash of color. For the best effect, limit your planting to two or three colors per bed. Too many colors together in one spot loses visual impact and looks messy.

Some of the most striking color combinations are mixtures of the primary colors – red, yellow and blue. Combinations of secondary colors – green, violet, and orange are also attention getters. For a more subtle color effect, combine flowers in a gradual sequence of colors – red to orange, yellow to green, blue to violet. Best of all, use your own eye to determine which color combinations you find most pleasing.

Select healthy flowers from your local garden store. The younger the plants are the better. Avoid buying ones that are tall and leggy and have obviously outgrown their pots. You can buy annual flowers in different sizes. Plants come in individual four and six inch pots or six-pack containers. The individual pots are more expensive, but their larger root ball gets them off to better start once planted.
The key to growing beautiful annual flowers is soil preparation. Choose a planting location that is well drained. Add lots of organic matter, such as well composted manure, desert compost or peat moss. Spread a 4 inch layer of organic matter over the flower bed and mix it in 12 inches deep. Also mix in to the top 12 inches of soil, ammonium phosphate (16-20-0) or similar analysis fertilizer. Use about 1 lb. of fertilizer for every 100 square feet of flower bed area.

At the time of planting, gently scratch the sides of the root ball with your fingers. This will encourage the roots to grow out into the planting soil quicker. Set plants at the same depth in the soil they’re growing in the pots. Immediately after planting, water the bed thoroughly. Continue to water daily. After the plants become established, space waterings farther apart. Watering every two or three days will be necessary as long as our temperatures remain unusually high. As temperatures cool, and especially in the winter, water on an as needed basis.

Monthly applications of about 2 pounds of ammonium phosphate (16-20-0) or similar analysis fertilizer per 100 square feet of bed area should keep your flowers healthy and full of bloom. If you have the time, remove faded flowers. Especially on geraniums, snapdragons, and begonias, pinching off faded blooms encourages increased flowering.

**Vegetable Workshop**

The Lake Havasu Master Gardeners are hosting a free workshop on growing vegetables on Saturday September 22 at 9:30 at the Library. Join us and learn how to grow your own vegetables, from planting to fertilizing we will cover it all.

*Laura Murphy is a Lake Havasu City Master Gardener. Information from John Begemen of the University of Arizona. For more information, contact the Lake Havasu City Master Gardeners by calling their Hot Line at 505-4105. Visit us at Home Garden Day, the first Tuesday of each month from 11-1 at the Library.*

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