

# Garden Center Guides



## Annuals

Annuals add unparalleled color and excitement to a landscape. A good landscape should include annuals, perennials, trees and shrubs.

in the pot, so plants establish quickly. Position the plants and pull the soil around the base. Cover the roots deep enough to slightly cover the original soil line of the plant. Do not pack the soil. Once the bed is planted, a preemergent weed preventive can be sprinkled around the plants and mixed in to the top half-inch of soil. The newly planted bed should be mulched with organic material (e.g. pine bark or fine cypress mulch). The mulch should be no more than 2 inches deep. This helps retain moisture, deter weeds and insulate the soil. Water the bed thoroughly. Regular watering promotes new growth and prevents heat stress.

Plant the bed as soon as danger of frost has passed. Getting plants in early will help them establish and cover the surface of the ground before air and soil temperatures rise and inhibit maximum growth. Shading the soil surface helps protect plants from temperature extremes.

### Common Concerns

Keep the garden free from weeds that attract insects and compete with annuals for moisture and nutrients. A second application of preemergent weed preventer can be added midseason to prevent late weed germination.

Annual beds can be changed each spring to add variety to the landscape. Multiple selections of plants with varying heights and colors add interest and dimension to the garden. Many new varieties have dynamic flowering capabilities and are resistant to diseases. Remove old plants and clean beds at the end of the season. Many insects and diseases overwinter in garden debris.

Outstanding annuals for Kansas are listed in the Prairie Star collection of outstanding annual plants tested at K-State Research and Extension centers in Olathe, Wichita, Hays and Colby. The list can be found at [www.oznet.ksu.edu](http://www.oznet.ksu.edu) under the gardening link.

### Care

The main concern for growing annuals is the amount of sunlight they receive. Annuals are grown in full sun, partial sun or shade. Many that tolerate full sun also do well in partial shade, and those that grow in shade can usually tolerate partial morning sun.

Partial sun is when the plant receives at least four to five hours of sun per day in the morning or afternoon. Full sun plants can withstand a full day of sun. Shade areas are those that get no direct sunlight but may receive light indirectly or light that is filtered through trees or other objects.

The key to growing a beautiful annual bed is soil preparation and fertilization throughout the growing season. Because annual flowers are borne on the terminal ends of the plant, support nitrogen levels from May to October for abundant flower production. A soil test is the best way to determine soil nutrient levels. Results will indicate deficiencies and the fertilizer analysis of what needs to be added. A balanced fertilizer such as 20-20-20 can be applied in a dry form at planting. Apply nitrogen and other nutrients as needed. Apply as a side dress of organic or pelleted slow-release fertilizer or a liquid water-soluble type.

Prepare the bed by working the ground to a depth of 6 to 8 inches. Incorporate 2 to 3 inches of organic matter and the dry fertilizer. The spacing of the plants will be determined by the spread of each type of annual, but usually 8-inch spacing is acceptable. Avoid walking on the prepared bed to prevent compaction. Before planting individual plants, butterfly the root system by placing your thumbs in the center of the base of the root ball and gently spreading the ball apart. This helps keep roots from coiling as they do

**Emily Nolting, Ph.D.**

Commercial Horticulture Specialist  
K-State Research and Extension  
[enolting@oznet.ksu.edu](mailto:enolting@oznet.ksu.edu)