

Arrowsmith Greenhouses

Nursery Notes



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"The world's favorite season is the spring. All things seem possible in May."- Edwin Way Teale

It is that time of year again when our thoughts turn to the yearly adventure commonly called bedding plant season. It is a hectic time of year for us in the garden centre. Our greenhouse becomes a beehive of activity as trucks roll in, plants are offloaded and moved through very quickly. The tables change daily and with each truck, new and exciting plants make their way from our place to yours. The most often asked question from April through to mid May is when can I plant these out. Our answer is always the same - as soon as the danger of frost has passed. Some years that is mid April but more often that we would like to admit that date is usually sometime around Mothers Day. The long weekend in May is still the most reliable planting weekend for bedding out plants. So in the meantime it is still great weather for planting perennials, shrubs and trees. Bedding plants in containers can be planted earlier than those in the ground but should still be watched if temperatures dip to below 5c.

We look forward to seeing you this bedding season.

We are open 7 days a week 9-5

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Visit us at the MARS
Plant Sale at the
Parksville Curling Club
Sat. April 27 10-2



Annuals

As that burst of colour from your spring flowering plants starts to fade, planting annuals becomes a priority for your garden. We commonly refer to anything that does not survive the winter here as an annual. While this is not technically correct for our purposes we will refer to anything that is tender as an annual.

When you are deciding what annuals to plant the most important thing to remember is - mass plantings will always give you more impact. Mass plantings do not have to be hundreds of plants, a mass planting can be as few as 3 plants grouped together. What you want to avoid is taking 3 plants and spreading them throughout your border. The plants become lost very quickly. Because few of us have gardens big enough to have borders dedicated only to annuals we need to incorporate annuals into our existing borders, to work alongside the trees and shrubs that form the backbone of our gardens. This is where mass plantings of 3 or 5 or 7 will give you the most im-



act.



The next thing to consider is colour and how much impact colour will have. If you want to be able to see the annuals from a distance you will need to stay away from pastel colours as they tend to be difficult to see from a distance. Yellow, orange, red and even white will give the most impact from a distance. If pastel colours are your preference use these in containers on your deck or in borders that are close, where you can appreciate their colour.

Exposure is critical when choosing annuals. Most annuals are sun lovers. But even sun lovers have varying requirements. Most annuals will require at least 4-6 hours of sun a day to do their best. If you are dealing with less than that you may need to look at shade annuals. If you are dealing with a south west exposure that could give up to 8 - hours of sun a day you will want to look at heat and drought tolerant annuals such as Geraniums, Portulaca, Celosia, Cleome or Zinnia.

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Some good choices for moderate sun are Marigolds, Petunias, Snapdragons and Begonias. For less than 4 hours of sun a day your best choices are Impatiens and Begonias.



Most annuals that you purchase in bedding 6 packs are seed grown. In recent years we have seen a dizzying number of new annuals that are sold as single plants. Many of these are hybrids that are grown from cuttings which makes them more expensive. While these can be planted in the garden, *economics*, usually mean that these are reserved for containers. These plants are discussed further in the article on Planting Containers.

Size and habit should also be considered when purchasing your annuals. A lot of annuals have many varieties of the same plant that can vary widely in size and shape. Marigolds are a good example - you can have very short 6 inch varieties all the way up to 3 foot high giants. Petunias also have a huge variation. When choosing Petunias for the garden compact varieties such as Dream, Madness and Carpet varieties are the best. None of these series need deadheading and will stay fairly compact. Cascading varieties should only be used in containers but these older varieties will need deadheading. Snapdragons are another that can range from 6 inches all the way up to 3 feet.

When planting annuals keep in mind that they are fast growing, heavy feeders. You will want to have readily available nutrients to give them the best start. This is usually achieved with good garden compost, sea soil or well rotted manure. A good organic fertilizer mixed in the planting hole is also a good idea. However, because annuals are such heavy feeders you may need to supplement throughout the growing season with a soluble fertilizer. When using a soluble fertilizer choose something with a higher middle number to boost the bloom.



Purple Fountain Grass

Annuals are some of the easiest plants to grow and will give you immediate results so give them a try, sit back and enjoy.

March-April Plant Profile

Dicentra spectabilis
"Goldheart"

This variation of our old fashioned Bleeding Heart is a great addition to the shade garden. What sets this apart is the beautiful gold foliage. It contrasts nicely against larger dark leaved plants that tend to dominate the shade garden.



While the common Bleeding Heart can be a bit rangy with a tendency to collapse when in full bloom this variety does not do that, managing to stay strong when heavy with bloom.

This is one of the earliest blooming of all shade perennials. Because of this it does go dormant by late summer but its spring show more than makes up for its early departure.



Dividing Grasses

Spring is the ideal time to divide ornamental grasses. Because most do not shine until late summer or fall dividing in spring gives them plenty of time to recover.

A mature clump of grass can yield 2, 3 or 10 plants depending on the number of crowns.



Dig a trench around the plant that you want to divide. Pry the whole plant out of the ground.

When digging the clump try not to let the roots dry out. A large clump may need a good knife to cut the clump while a small clump can usually be pulled apart with your hands.

Once the desired number of divisions are made, replant and water as soon as possible.

To Do List

May

- All the cool season vegetables should be planted by the first week of May. This includes lettuce, peas, onions, carrots, spinach, radishes and beans.
- Hanging Baskets can be left out as soon as the night time temperatures are not dropping below 5 degrees.
- Containers with annuals should be planted up early in May.
- Stake tall perennials early in the month - before they need staking.
- Feed spring bulbs as the flowers finish to encourage good bloom for next year. Fertilize with a high middle number fertilizer - 6-8-6 or a sprinkling of organic mix.
- Dahlias and Cannas should be planted out early in May.
- Be on the lookout for aphids and rub them off or use an insecticidal soap - especially watch the roses and honeysuckle.
- Prune flowering shrubs as they finish flowering such as Forsythia, Sarcococca, Osmanthus etc.
- Fertilize Rhododendrons after they finish blooming.
- Stay on top of the weeding. This is the most prolific time of year for some of our most bothersome weeds like snapweed and chickweed.
- Annuals can be planted out around the May long weekend. Still be careful with the tender ones such as Impatiens.
- Fertilize Shrubs and Trees. Once a year is usually all that is needed.



June

- Plant out tender vegetables now such as tomatoes, cucumbers, zucchini, and basil.
 - Cut back early perennials that have finished blooming to encourage a second bloom.
 - Early in June a second application of lawn fertilizer can be applied. Make sure to use a fertilizer with only slow release nitrogen.
 - If your clumps of Bearded Iris are getting to large now is the time to dig and divide them. Being careful to replant the rhizomes at soil level.
 - Deadhead roses as they finish blooming to encourage more bloom.
 - Deadhead and fertilize hanging baskets. A weekly ½ strength 15-30-15 is recommended.
 - Make sure that newly planted trees and shrubs are well watered.
- Take some time this month to sit back and enjoy your garden.



Planting Containers

With space at a premium for many of us we rely heavily on containers to give us all summer colour. Containers give you the power to push the envelope on plant combinations that you could never do in a garden situation.

Success with containers starts with the soil that you choose. You need to choose a mix that will hold moisture but at the same time is not too heavy. If the soil is too heavy it will become compacted, making root growth difficult. If you choose a soil that is too light or peaty you will struggle constantly with keeping the container hydrated. You can mix your own soil by combining a peat based soil with your own garden compost. A good recipe would look something like this:

- 1 part peat mix
- 1 part sea soil
- 1 part garden compost
- ½ part perlite
- 1 cup of organic fertilizer per cubic foot of soil



When choosing plants use about 10 2" pots per 12" of diameter. With containers you are going to count on the plants knitting together to give you your overall effect. You will want to choose plants that will give height and plants that will spill over the edge. You will also need to add plants that will give the container bulk. These are known as filler plants. One of the best filler plants for overall



bloom time and size are the Supertunias. These plants will still look great into the fall and will fill in plants that may have finished blooming early. Many of the plants that we sell for containers are from the Proven Winner series of plants. Many of these plants have been bred specifically for containers for long bloom time, drought tolerance and overall plant shape. The proven winner website has great container recipes and wonderful pictures to help you plan your container plantings. The website is www.provenwinners.com.

Once planted it is very important to keep the container hydrated. Most containers will require supplemental fertilizing through the season. Usually once every 10 days with a soluble fertilizer with a higher middle number will keep your containers blooming all season.