

Gardening – Level 4 Flowers

Annual versus Perennial Flowers

The very first thing we need to do is understand the terminology. Below we have the terms and the definitions of those terms. This way no one is confused by the terms and we can move forward with the same understanding.

What is an Annual Flower:

An annual grows from seed and blooms and sets seed and then dies in just one growing season. Petunia and marigold are examples of flowers widely grown as annuals. Annuals need to be replanted each spring. Most annuals bloom continuously from spring through fall.

What is a Perennial Flower:

A perennial flower lives for three or more seasons. It may or may not be mature enough to bloom the first year from seed. (Hint: P is for Permanent and for Perennial). Perennials will need periodic rejuvenation and/or replacement, typically every three to five years. Most perennials bloom for only a short period -- a week or two or three -- once a year.

What is a Biennial Flower:

A biennial grows vegetatively its first year, lives over the winter, then finally blooms in the second season. Once it has bloomed and set seed, it dies. Foxgloves and hollyhocks are usually biennial.

Gardening is never simple. There are always exceptions. Wrap your mind around these:

Half Hardy Annual:

This is an interesting term and varies in usage depending on your climate. It describes plants that are perennial in warmer climates but can be grown as annuals in colder climates. These plants can be categorized with annuals because they will bloom the first year from seed. They are termed half hardy because although they can handle frost, they can't survive extremely cold winter weather. If you live in a cold winter climate, you would not realistically expect these to come back the next year. But if you live in an area with mild winters, they may be perennial for you. Osteospermum is an example of a half hardy annual, as is snapdragon (*Antirrhinum*). And in a mid-way location, you may find they survive and overwinter successfully for you during especially mild years -- but not all years.

Frost Tender Annual or Tender Perennial:

You may see this term used to indicate a perennial plant grown as an annual because it is killed by frost. If you live in a frost free climate, this plant would be perennial for you. If you live where it gets cold enough to frost, you will lose it!

Comparing annual and perennial flowers is a little like comparing apples and oranges. Each type of flower has its own characteristics and advantages.

Annual flowers

Annual flowers are those that complete their lifecycle in just one growing season. In other words, you plant a seed (or a seedling plant), it grows foliage, then flowers, seeds and then the plant dies, all in the same year. Annual flowers tend to bloom from spring until autumn frost. Although they must be replanted each year, annuals are hard to beat in terms of showy, season-long color.

Popular annual flowers include petunias, marigolds, zinnias and impatiens. If you're looking for something a little more exotic than these traditional bedding plants, try spider flower (*Cleome*), gazania, vinca (*Catharanthus*) and lisianthus (*Eustoma*). Some annuals are grown for their attractive foliage rather than flowers, including coleus, Joseph's coat and snow-on-the-mountain. You can add some edible interest with ornamental peppers, flowering cabbage and okra.

Annuals are one of the most popular plants mainly because they supply beautiful pops of color even though they are only temporary. They are the easiest flowers to take care of, and are the least expensive. Annual means yearly, so annual plants are plants that complete their whole life cycle within one year. It is best to plant annuals in the spring so they will flower throughout the summer and fall and then they usually die at the first frost of winter. This means that you would have to replant new annuals each spring. People mainly like annuals because they supply vibrant colors and are fairly easy to care for.

Annuals can fill in where your other shrubs or trees are lacking. Pots and containers are great for annuals because it is easy to remove them out of a container once their life cycle is complete.

Also, containers are mobile so you can move them to different locations for beautiful color all around your home. Another characteristic of annuals is that they generally demand less fertilizing compared to other plants.

Annuals - Pros

- Annuals are available in a wide variety of sizes and colors and only last a year, so each year you can pick new and different plants; annuals are also great fill-in plants while you wait for perennials to multiply.

Annuals - Cons

- You must purchase and plant a new crop of annuals each year.

Perennial flowers

Perennial flowers are those that grow for three or more years. Although most perennials tend to have a relatively short season of bloom, combining several species in your planting can yield season-long color.

There is no end to the colors, textures and sizes available in perennial plants. Some of the most popular perennials include daylilies, hosta, peonies and garden mums. For a spikey show of blue, try blazing star (*Liatris*). Or for a delicate bouquet of yellow, try coreopsis 'Moonbeam.' For dramatic late-season color, try black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia*) and purple coneflower (*Echinacea*).

Perennials are popular because they come back year after year, are easy to grow and come in a large variety of colors. Perennials usually live for more than two years if taken care of correctly. They normally cover the ground well and most are able to survive a cold winter. Once winter hits, perennials die down to the roots (but the roots stay alive in a dormant state), then when the warm spring weather rolls around new foliage and flowers begin to come up.

Perennials are also great candidates for pots and containers. Perennials that live in containers are more susceptible to cold weather, so it is smart to make sure to know your climate zone before expecting your perennials to survive the winter in a container or pot. Most perennials grow larger every year which is great for filling in spaces in a garden. On the other hand, if they grow too large without being divided or trimmed they can take over the other plants around it.

Dividing is when you dig out a small living portion “clump” of the plant. Then you want to move the smaller living plant to another place for it to grow.

Perennials - Pros

- Perennials require little maintenance and will reward you with blooms year after year; they also multiply, providing you with additional plants over the years for free. Purchase a perennial this year and you will not need to [buy](#) new plants.

Perennials - Cons

- Since perennials multiply, they will require periodic thinning. If you do not think the [plants](#), overcrowding will occur and flower production will decrease. Thinning requires digging up some of the plants, pulling or cutting them apart and replanting; this process must be repeated about once every three years.

Benefits of Using Both Perennials and Annuals

- Most gardeners prefer a mix; perennials provide constant beauty, while the annuals give the gardener the opportunity to change things up a bit.

Can't decide whether to plant annuals or perennials? No need to pick one or the other. Annuals and perennials can be combined in your planting design to reap the best of both!