



# J&L's Gardening Handouts

Tips and Suggestions for Year Round Gardening

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## Planting Tips for Annual Flowers & Vegetables

Planting flower beds of annuals and perennials is a yearly ritual for many gardeners. The variety of blooms and colors are almost endless. One of the greatest things about growing an annual flower garden is that you can mix things up each year with different flowers, use various colors, and try unique layouts.

Many annual flowers bloom from early in the season, until they die in the fall, compared with perennial flowers which have a comparatively short bloom time. Annual flowers complete their life cycle in a single season: you plant seed in spring; the plants grow and flower through the summer; they die in the fall. Unlike perennial flowers, the plants will not regrow from overwintered roots the next spring, although some plants produce seeds that will germinate and grow the following year.

Why do some annuals thrive and grow, regardless of the soil type and conditions, while others wilt and die at the first sign of any stress? **Several Factors Make a Big Difference:**



### Soil Preparation:

Plants grow best in soil that has been loosened before planting, to allow ready penetration of both oxygen and water. A shovel, a spading fork, or a rototiller works well for loosening the ground, turning the soil, and breaking up any dirt clods.

Spread 3 to 4in of organic matter (**Bumper Crop Compost, Nutrimulch, Fertimulch**, or well-rotted manure) over the entire area to be prepared, then turn it into the soil to a depth of approximately 10 to 12in. You can get good results by digging down just one shovel's depth if you do not have a tiller.



### Planting Time and Guidelines:

If your plants are fresh from the protected environment of a greenhouse, they need to be **'hardened off'**. This is the gradual introduction to direct sun, and drying breezes, before planting them. Set plants outdoors in a sheltered, lightly shaded spot, increasing their exposure to sun and wind each day. At the end of a week, they will be ready to plant in the ground.

Before planting, check the moisture of the plants. Water them thoroughly if they are dry. Dig a hole just slightly larger than the pot. Remove the plant from the pot by grasping the rim, turning the pot upside down, and tapping it against the heel of your hand.

If the plant is root-bound (the root ball matted with roots to the point that they obscure the potting mix), gently break up the sides of the ball with your thumbs, and spread apart any roots that are circling at the bottom. This procedure encourages the roots to grow out of the potting mix, and into the surrounding soil.

Set the root ball in the hole so that the top of the ball is level with the surface of the soil. Then push soil around, and just over the top of the root ball. Gently firm the soil, and



give the plant a thorough soaking to settle the soil.

### Watering:

The key to getting a new plant off to a good start is moisture. Water thoroughly after planting, and keep a close eye on the plant every day over the following week.

If you see it wilt on a hot, sunny day, check the soil to a depth of about 1in. If the soil is dry, water thoroughly. If the soil below the surface is moist to the touch, don't water. The plant is probably wilting because the roots are unable to supply the top with sufficient moisture, even though the soil is damp. The remedy is to shade the plant temporarily. Within a week or so, the roots should catch up, and you can remove the shading.

After the first week, give new plants a good soaking once or twice a week during the summer. Do not water plants every day; it is the worst thing you can do for your plants. If your soil dries out too fast, add more compost, or **Soil Moist** granules, to help maintain a consistent moisture level.

Established plants can get by on less water than newly planted ones, but most grow best if the soil remains evenly moist. Please note that more water is not better for the plants; it is sometimes detrimental. When in doubt, don't over-water.

### Fertilizing:

At planting time, apply a water-soluble fertilizer such as **Root Starter, 20-20-20 Fertilizer**, or **Blooming and Rooting Fertilizer**, at half strength.

We also recommend scattering a slow-release fertilizer around the feet of annuals at planting time. **Osmo-cote Fertilizer** slowly fertilizes your plants each time you water. It lasts up to 4 months.

When plants are established, apply **Fertilome Blooming and Rooting Fertilizer**, once or twice a month all summer. This will keep them blooming their very best.



**Finally**, to look their best, most plants need regular grooming. Remove spent flowers regularly and prune vigorous growers to keep them in check.



## 'Hardening Off' Tender Plants

Nothing is worse than spending a lot of effort starting your seeds early, and then watch them die as soon as you plant them outside. Before planting your young, tender seedlings outside into the cold, windy garden, you should 'Harden Them Off.'



Many new gardeners don't have the foggiest idea what "hardening off" means. Hardening off means that you need to acclimate your plants from indoor temperatures, to the outdoor growing conditions. Because plants usually are grown in greenhouses (or as seedlings in a kitchen window), they are often soft and tender. They need to be introduced slowly to the outside elements of wind and intense sunlight.

- \* A week or two before you set your plants out in your garden, stop fertilizing them, and reduce the amount of water you give them. Let them dry out slightly. Give plants just enough water so they don't wilt severely. This will allow tender plants to toughen up, and will prepare them for being transplanted.
- \* Put plants outdoors for short periods of time, in a semi-shaded area. Gradually increase the time the plants are left outdoors; you also need to gradually increase their exposure to sun. After 7 to 14 days, these plants will be ready for the outdoor garden.
- \* Warning: make sure that you bring the plants in every night for the first few days. One cold night outside can do some major damage.
- \* Another option is to put your plants inside a cold frame, and then you can open the cold frame each day, and close it each night. Plants that are grown in a cold frame will need much less time hardening off.
- \* It's a good idea to transplant on a cloudy day, when the plants won't get full exposure to the hot sun on their first day in the ground. If this is not possible, try putting



a piece of cardboard on the south west side of the plant, or put a 5 gallon bucket, with the bottom removed, over them, to furnish a little shade for the first few days.



- \* After planting, be aware of the possibility of frost, and be prepared to protect tender transplants. Use frost blankets, or a 'wall of water', until the weather is safe. **Tip:** Putting a 5 gallon bucket over the plants is a quick and easy way to protect them from both sunburn, and from a 'mild frost'. The last average frost in our area is May 15, but even then you never know for sure.
- \* Gardeners are always eager to plant early, and to get a jump on spring. However, many carefully nurtured tomato and pepper plants have been killed by frost, or have been stunted by cold soil. Stunted plants take a long time to catch up with healthy plants.



**\* Protect your investment by planting outside 'A Little Later', rather than by planting 'A Little Too Early'.**

## Gardening in Containers:

Plants in containers need special care. They dry out more quickly than plants in the ground: In the heat of the summer, you may have to water them daily. Because of the need for frequent watering, nutrients soon wash out of the bottom of the pot.

We recommend that you use a potting mix specifically designed for use in containers. You can incorporate a moisture holding additive (**Soil Moist**) and a slow-release fertilizer (**Osmocote**) into the potting mix before you put the soil mix in to the container.

In addition, to keep annuals growing and flowering all summer, we recommend that you water once a month with a water-soluble fertilizer (**Fertilome Blooming and Rooting Fertilizer**).

Finally, to look their best, most plants in containers need regular grooming. Remove spent flowers regularly and prune vigorous growers to keep them in check.

*Please read our Container Gardening Handout for more information.*

## More Resources:

For more information, please read some other J&L Handouts:  
*Planting Trees and Shrubs*  
*Garden Soil Basics*  
*Healthy Garden Soil*  
*Container Gardening*  
*Planting Times for Annual Flowers and Vegetables*  
*Starting Seeds Indoors*  
*Water: Too Much, Too Little, Too Late*  
[https://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/Horticulture\\_HomeHorticulture\\_2011-01pr.pdf](https://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/Horticulture_HomeHorticulture_2011-01pr.pdf)  
[http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/factsheet/pub\\_3794934.htm](http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/factsheet/pub_3794934.htm)  
[http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/Horticulture\\_Vegetables\\_2015-02.pdf](http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/Horticulture_Vegetables_2015-02.pdf)

## Rule of Thumb:

***Its Better To Plant Annual Flowers  
'A Week Too Late', Than 'A Day Too Early':  
Unless You Like To 'Plant Things Twice'.***

