

Growing Annuals in Colorado

A basic guide to growing gorgeous annuals in our challenging Colorado climate



Choose Plants by Sun Requirements

Observe your site to determine the amount of direct sun.

Morning sun is cooler. South and west facing gardens are the hottest.

Full Sun: 6 or more hours of direct sun

Part Sun: 3 to 5 hours of direct sun

Shade: 2 hours or fewer direct sun (usually morning sun)

Choose plants whose sun requirements match your area. Our annual plants are organized by sun requirements, and our signs provide recommendations for the best Colorado environment for specific plants.

Our team members can suggest plants for your area or provide additional information about a specific plant.

When to Plant

Wait until after the last spring frost to plant annuals outside. In the Denver area this is usually around May 15. Those living in higher altitudes in Parker or Castle Rock may want to wait until May 30. For the most success, watch weather forecasts carefully. Move container gardens into a garage or sheltered area if temperatures fall below 38° F.



[Watch our video](#) on protecting plants from freezing temperatures.

Acclimate

Greenhouse-grown plants need to be introduced to the outdoors **before** being planted in the ground. Gradually introduce them to outdoor conditions over a period of 3 to 5 days. Begin by placing them in a protected area with a little morning sun the first day. Slowly increase the amount of sun each day until the plant is adjusted to conditions in its new home.

At a Glance

Observe your site to determine how much sunlight it receives.

Full Sun: 6+ hours direct sun

Part Sun: 3-5 hours direct sun

Shade: 2 hours or fewer direct sun

Acclimate greenhouse-grown plants to the outdoors for 3 to 5 days before planting.

Soil:

Garden beds - mix 1/3 compost to 2/3 native soil

Containers - quality potting soil, not native soil

Water: To determine whether plants need water, stick your finger into the soil, and if it's dry down to your first knuckle, give plants a drink.

Soil Conditions

Garden beds: Mix 1/3 compost to 2/3 native soil before planting. Only the top 6 inches of soil needs to be worked for annual flowers. If you are using a granular fertilizer, mix it into the soil now.

Containers: Use a good quality potting soil. Don't use native soil from the ground! We recommends changing the soil in your containers each year to avoid trouble with pests or viruses that can overwinter in soils. If using a granular fertilizer, mix it with the soil before planting.

How to Plant

- Dig a hole slightly larger than the pot containing your plant.
- Gently remove plant by tapping on the bottom of the pot to release the roots.
- Gently loosen a few roots around the root ball without breaking them.
- Place the plant in the hole so that the current soil level of the plant is even with the soil level in the ground or the new container.
- Place more soil around the plant and gently tamp the soil down evenly.
- Water thoroughly.
- Planting in the early evening or on a shady day reduces stress to plants.

Caring for Your Plants

Watering - Our rapidly changing weather makes watering tricky. The easiest way to determine if it is time to give your plants a drink is to stick your finger down into the soil. If the soil is dry down to the first knuckle on your finger, then it's time to water. Moisture meters are another effective way to determine moisture needs. Always water thoroughly until water drains from the bottom of the container. Then wait until the container dries down slightly before watering again. Check the soil moisture daily.

Fertilizing - Annual flowers need fertilizer on a regular basis to perform at their best. We recommends fertilizing with a water soluble plant food at the rate and frequency suggested by the manufacturer. Granular fertilizers mixed into the soil at planting time are helpful, but usually not enough to sustain optimal blooming over the entire season.

Deadheading - removing spent blossoms encourages the plant to form new blooms. Cut back to the base of the stem above the next leaf set.

Pinching Back - keeps a plant compact rather than getting too 'leggy'. Cut back to just above the next leaf set. Never trim back more than 1/3 of the plant.

Wildlife

Rabbits and deer are particularly fond of certain annuals and perennials, but when they are really hungry they will eat just about anything. If your yard is not fenced, you may want to consider selecting plants animals are less likely to eat.

Rabbits and deer tend to pass on "native" and strong smelling flowers and herbs like salvia, catmint, lavender, marigold, lantana, daffodils, agastache, oregano, and thyme.

Magnet plants such as roses, vegetables, and tulips will be sure to attract rabbits and deer. These are best grown in a protected area.

Liquid sprays that deter grazing wildlife are available in our garden supplies department.