



Landscaping With Flowers

When we think of planning a flower garden, we are usually concerned with a flower border rather than a large plot of flowers. No longer is it common to make many separate little beds of flowers. We leave the center of the yard as a lawn with flowers concentrated around the edge in a border. Annual flowers for cutting and edgings may also be combined with a vegetable garden or small fruit planting.

For brand new homeowners and people who rent homes, this flower border may be composed entirely of annuals. For established homeowners this flower border often contains some perennials.

Annuals live from late spring until the first frost of the following autumn. Because annuals are frost-sensitive, plant them in the garden after the danger of the last frost in your locality. Annuals start blooming early in the growing season and may provide color all summer. Most annuals are relatively shallow-rooted and can be grown in some of the locations where the topsoil is shallow or soil drainage is not good enough for some perennials. Planting in raised beds may overcome imperfect drainage.

Perennials survive through winter for at least three years or more. Survival depends on the type of plant, drainage conditions of the soil, winter protection and severity of the climate.

Biennials are plants that usually take two growing seasons to flower and complete their life cycle. With these plants, new seedlings must be started each year to insure bloom.

Bulbs, annuals, biennials and perennials are usually included in the border plan, selected for a succession of bloom and permanent color. Perennials provide the backbone of the border, while bulbs give early spring color and annuals fill in where early flowering perennials have already gone by.

Seed of some annuals can be sown directly in the garden. Some perennials can be sown in late summer of one year to bloom in the spring of the following year. Where the plants come up too thick, thin them to a spacing of six to ten inches by pulling some as soon as the plants have four true leaves and you can tell them from the weeds. Annual plants from seed sown directly in the garden in the spring do not bloom until mid or late summer.

To have flowering plants from early summer to fall, use small plants that have been started in pots, flats, or some other container at commercial greenhouses. Starting annual plants from seed in the house is also rewarding. However, if you start them too early, the plants may become spindly and weak as the result of insufficient sunlight, temperatures higher than 60° F, improper watering and lack of humidity control.

Planning borders or beds of flowers

The size and type of background available may often dictate the space devoted to the development of a flower planting. Borders should be planned at least six feet deep and may be as long as you can care for. For a good showing of color from early spring till late fall, your border may be up to 12 feet wide. A deeper border is difficult to weed and water. With a 6- to 8-foot bed there is room to plant 3 or 4 groups of different flowers from front to back. Plants are arranged in a border seen from only one side, with low ones in the foreground and taller plants toward the back of the planting.

It is not necessary to border the entire lawn area or house foundation with flowers. A short, well-cared for flower border will give a much better effect than a long, straggly, weedy one. Ground covers, low evergreens, or flowering shrubs can be planted to fill in the border area not planted to flowers. You can pick the best drained and most sunny location for the flower border and plant the shrubs in the other areas. Try to plan the flower border so that it can also be seen from indoors or from a terrace. This will give you extra benefits in home grounds beautification.

The ideal way to start planning a garden is to make a series of plans on paper. This will afford a chance to arrange plants by height, color, and season of bloom. An idea on paper is much easier to change than having to dig up and move a group of plants. Draw the garden to scale on a piece of graph (cross-section) paper. The scale selected will depend upon the size of the garden.

Develop large, bold masses for the various plant groupings according to height arrangement. Allow ample space for each plant grouping. The most common mistakes are not allowing enough distance between plants and using too many plants.

A plan can be developed in many ways. It may be easier to start out with height designations (high-medium-low), whether it is to be an annual, biennial, or perennial, and the season of flowering (spring-summer-fall). After determining these factors, check through garden books or catalogs for plants to fit the particular areas on the plan, and write in the kind and the variety of plant desired.

A plan also provides a permanent record of what plants are where. But remember, a plan can be changed, so one should not feel bound by a first decision.

Placing plants

When placing plants, think in terms of your planting as having three major zones to create a natural three-dimensional effect. Plants should be set in groups rather than as single plants. This is particularly true of front border and middle border plantings. The front border plants (those under one foot high) should be set in long, narrow groupings to promote the effect of length in the border.

Avoid an alternating pattern of two or three single plants, which gives a spotty, shortening effect. Middle border plants (1 to 3 feet high) may be set in groups of 5 to 10 plants. The grouping should be oval or rectangular in outline. Back border plants (plants over three feet) should be planted in small groups (two or three) or even as a single plant if the variety is fairly large and spreading. The general planting plan will then assume a pyramid form, with front border plants as a long, narrow base.

Plants in the front and middle border groups usually spread as wide as they are tall. Therefore, in planning for a depth of the border, allow about a foot for each row of front border plants; 2 feet for middle border plants, and 2 to 3 feet for back border plants. Some back border plants tend to be fairly tall and narrow so not as much width as height is needed.

With these measurements in mind, it is easy to see that a minimum depth border of six feet would include only about one row each of front, middle and back border plants. To get a wider selection of plants and to get more color throughout the season, a wider border with more rows of front and middle border plants is necessary.

Grouping plants of the same kind is better than scattering single plants out along the entire garden. Clumps of three or five delphinium, three or four phlox, etc., will make for impressive groups in the border. Masses all of one color often are more pleasing than a mixture of colors. But this is not always possible with many kinds of plants, especially annuals.

Edging the border

The front edge of the border may be straight or gently curved. A long, gentle curve can be easily visualized by laying out a garden hose. Short, scallop-like curves are not good design. They cause the eye to divide the border into short segments. On the other hand, a long, gentle curve has an elongating effect which gives the illusion of greater length to the informal border.

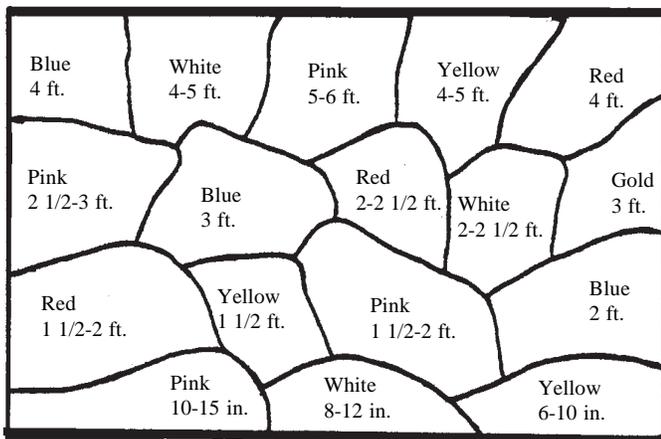
A straight-line border is very definite and formal and easiest to maintain. While it does not give the easy grace of the curved edge, neither does not have the short, choppy effect of the scalloped edge.

Site preparation and maintenance

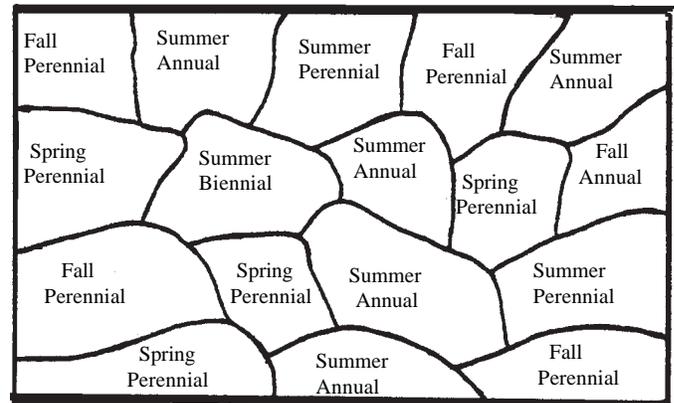
If the pH is below 6.0, ground limestone should be applied at a rate of 50 pounds per 1,000 square feet on most soils. With heavy clay soils, you can go to 80 pounds. For most trees, shrubs, and flowers, one pound of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet of area usually can be applied to the surface. When slow-release materials are used or when incorporation is to be practiced, slightly higher rates may be employed, following manufacturer's label instructions.

Most plants, except weeds, do not grow well unless they are given some care. Watering is important during periods of drought. A thorough weekly soaking is preferable to a light sprinkling each night. An inch of water a week (rainfall or irrigation) is a good "rule" to follow.

Shallow cultivation with a hoe or cultivator to cut off seedling weeds improves the general appearance of any planting and removes competitors for nutrients and moisture. Deep loosening of the soil is not necessary and usually cuts off the plant roots or brings up more weed seeds. Mulches of rooted sawdust, black plastic, etc. control weeds, conserve moisture, and help keep the soil surface in good shape for absorbing moisture.



Divide a flower border into bold plant groupings according to color and height. For the background, select groups of tall plants. In the foreground, shallower, wide groupings of small plants.



Select garden groups as to season of flowering and whether annual, biennial, or perennial. This should be followed up by a variety selection for each kind.

original fact sheet by Charles H. Williams, revised and reformatted, 3/01

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