



INCORPORATING ANNUALS INTO AN EARTH-KIND™ LANDSCAPE DESIGN

Advantages

- Annuals give greater impact, especially at a distance; more gardeners get more bang for the buck.
- Annuals generate more compliments.
- Home gardeners, even inexperienced ones, have a greater probability of success.
- Annuals help overcome difficult situations within a landscape.

Garden Areas

Divide your property into these areas:

1. The front yard becomes the public area.
2. The backyard is divided into two use areas:

Family living: This area encompasses the majority of the backyard; use fencing and/or plant materials to eliminate objectionable views. Create wide, sweeping beds on the edges of the yard which will surround an open turf area in center. Use round curves or soften any harsh right angles. For example, begin and end beds at the corners of walks or patios. Avoid straight lines.

Service: This area is smaller in size, but very important. Consolidate clutter here, then screen from view. The service area includes space for garbage bins, compost bins, a tool shed, etc.

Design Principles for Annuals

Employ annual pockets of color like beads on a string to lead the viewer's eye to areas of your choosing (examples: to the front door, to a garden focal point, etc.) The single bright thread of color is on an otherwise solid green tapestry. During a particular season of the year, use only one or two colors of annuals to create this "single thread of color" that will help to visually unify a given viewing area.

Planting locations in the front yard:

1. Capture the viewer's attention at the driveway, and then lead them to the front door.
2. Use in small, arched beds to soften harsh 90-degree angles: (1) where the street and the drive intersect, (2) where the drive and the front walk intersect, and (3) along the front walk itself.
3. At the front door to serve as the minor accent.

Planting locations in the backyard:

1. In the foreground of an accent corner.
2. In ground beds near the patio and in the containers on the patio.
3. As needed to draw the viewer's attention away from unattractive areas or objects (examples: air conditioning compressor, propane tank, ugly garden shed, etc.).

Utilize fine-textured plants (those with small leaves) to make a small area appear larger. Plant only coarse-textured plants (those with large leaves) as accents or in large open areas.

Fast growing annual and/or tropical vines can be used to provide quick shade on overhead patio structures or to screen objectionable views. Examples of such plants include morning glory and moon vine.

Color Schemes

Too much variety in color and plant types leads to visual chaos. Don't fall into this trap! Emphasize drifts of the same plant or color; avoid a "busy look." Strive for continuity and the strength of design by not using more than two colors in annual plantings within a specific viewing area in any given season of the year. White is normally a good candidate for the second color.

A monochromatic color scheme (example: several shades of the color pink) also works very well. It lends a sophisticated air to the design and is so easy it's almost foolproof.

Within a given viewing area, the color scheme for annuals in containers should match that of annuals in ground-level beds.

Cool colors (blues, greens) appear to recede from the viewer's eye, thus making an area look larger. Hot colors (reds, oranges and yellows) make an area look smaller.

Size of Planting

For maximum visual impact, plant annuals in large drifts of only one or two colors.

If limitations of time and money preclude large plantings, plant in smaller "pockets of color" (example: the size of a card table). It is important to *completely* fill these drifts or pockets with plants. Change out plantings 3 to 4 times per year.

Arrangement With in a Bed

Annuals are normally used at the front of a bed, as facer plants, with a backdrop of evergreen or deciduous shrubs to block distracting views. Annuals are also used in a drift to surround the base of major accent near the front entryway. The garden can combine trailing forms in the foreground, with mounding forms in the middle, and upright forms at the back of the bed.

Guidance for Gardeners

Develop, display and enjoy your own “Favorite Four:” These are four very well adapted, long blooming, low maintenance, highly pest resistant, fool-proof annuals. Create your “Favorite Four” so that one favorite blooms in spring, another in summer, a third in fall, and the last over the winter. Actually, it is best to devise two sets of “Favorite Fours”, one for full sun, the other for light, dappled shade.

Bed Preparation

In poorly aerated clay soils like what we have in Rockwall County, plant in raised beds. Even raising beds just 4 to 6 inches is very helpful as it provides a place to which excess moisture can drain, thus increasing aeration within the root zone. First, add a layer of expanded shale, 3 to 4 inches thick, then incorporate into the soil to a depth of 8 to 10 inches. Next, add a layer of organic material (preferably composted), 3 to 4 inches thick, then incorporate into the soil to a depth of 8 to 10 inches. Repeat this incorporation of organic material each year.

Pre-plant fertilization: Incorporate 2 pounds of slow-release nitrogen fertilizer per 100 square feet of planting area. Base your choice of the fertilizer analysis on the results of a soil test that you had done on your soil. In clay soils, be alert to the fact that phosphorus remains in the soil for long periods and often builds to damaging levels within 3 to 4 years.

Post-plant fertilization: Annuals love lots of nitrogen, so apply blood meal as a side dressing every 6 weeks. Thoroughly wash blood meal from foliage after application.

Maintenance

Particularly during stressful climatic conditions, it is best to plant transplants which are not yet in bloom. Soon after transplanting, mulch the bed (completely cover all exposed soil) with a layer of organic material 3 to 4 inches thick.

For ground beds, when soil is dry to a depth of one inch, water thoroughly (add enough water to moisten soil to a depth of 6 to 8 inches). Drip irrigation is best, soaker hose irrigation is next best.

For containers: when growing medium is dry to a depth of one inch, water thoroughly (until water drains out of the bottom of the container.) Big, fast-growing annuals in hanging baskets require almost constant attention to watering. Placing such plants in large (14-inch diameter) containers means the watering requirements are much more forgiving.

- Source: Adapted from a presentation by Dr. Steve George, Extension Landscape Specialist with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension.