

Renfrow Flower Gardening

Renfrow Farms & Hardware
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What is a flower?

A flower is the reproductive, seed-bearing structure of a plant.

Why do we grow flowers?

Beauty (bouquets), nature (pollinator & beneficial insect attractants), & nourishment (edible)

There are many different types, shapes, & functions of flowers, more than can be listed here. We will primarily focus on the different categories of growth habits in this class.

Single flowers have simple rings of petals surrounding visible pollen-covered anthers; these are almost always better for attracting pollinators and other beneficial insects due to their easily accessible pollen and nectar

Double flowers have been bred specifically to have more petals and fewer reproductive parts; doubles are often more desirable as ornamentals and cut flowers due to their more showy nature

Annuals, Biennials, Perennials

Annual - Some annuals are frost-sensitive and only grown in the garden between Tax Day and Halloween. Some are cold-hardy but still have less than one year's life span. These can be planted in fall and winter and bloom in winter and/or spring, dying in the heat of summer.

Biennial - a plant that takes two years to complete its life cycle. In vegetable & herb world, the most common ones are root crops, Swiss chard, onions, parsley, . In the flower world, some of the most common biennials are sweet william dianthus, rudbeckia (blackeye susans), foxglove, campanula, stock, lunaria, forget-me-not

Perennial - a plant that lives for more than 2 years. Some are short-lived perennials (3-4 years) and some can live for decades. Herbaceous perennials die back to the ground each fall and spring out with new growth from their root stock in the spring. Many perennial flowers do not put up blooms until their second year, focusing on their plant growth for the first year. Peonies may take three years after planting to start blooming, but once they really get going they may outlive you. *Woody shrubs like hydrangeas fall into this category too, but the details of "woodies" are outside of the scope of this handout & class.*

Seeds, Plants, Bulbs

Seeds - nearly all annual crops are started from seed. Skill level needed for seed-starting varies significantly based on the crop. Many seeds can be sown directly in the ground at their appropriate time of year (this timing is of utmost importance). Some must be started inside to achieve success (lisianthus, campanula, eucalyptus, many perennials).

***Very important for new flower growers** if you are sowing lots of new-to-you seed varieties, MARK WHERE YOU PLANT THEM because they will be very hard to identify when young.*
Plants

Warm-Season Annuals (frost-sensitive)

Direct-seeded summer-blooming annuals: cosmos, marigolds, zinnias, sunflowers, nasturtiums, basil, euphorbia "snow on the mountain"

Start indoors 6-8 weeks before final frost: gomphrena, ageratum, amaranth, coxcomb celosia, spike celosia

Cool-Season Annuals (frost-tolerant and cold hardy)

Direct-seeded "Cool flowers" : agrostemma, ammi (Queen Anne's Lace, highest quality as a cut flower, better than the roadside blooms), Dara (purple ammi-like lace flower), nigella "love in a mist", larkspur, bachelor buttons, poppy, Chinese forget-me-not, bupleurum, dill, bells of Ireland, some Asclepias (milkweed) varieties. Sow in September-November or in February. 6-8 weeks before first frost or 6-8 weeks before last frost. I have had great success sowing in early November as well in our mild climate.

These cool-season annuals will bloom in the spring, with fall-planted and winter-planted batches often staggering by a couple of weeks. *Anticipated bloom window is late April - early June.*

Start these perennials and biennials indoors in January/February or in August for fall-planting: snapdragons, feverfew, yarrow, campanula, others. Most bloom May-July.

**Many of these crops will reseed in the garden if blossoms are left on the plant to mature and produce seed heads that then shatter and scatter in the garden. Some of our favorite self-reseeding crops at the farm are these: ammi, bupleurum, dara, spike celosia, zinnias*

Plants - if you are going to buy flower plants, the most "bang for your buck" will typically come from planting perennial & biennial plants that already have a decent bit of time spent on growing, as many germinate and grow slowly at the beginning of their lives.

Bulbs/Corms/Tubers/Rhizomes - most flowers in this category are perennials and will come back on their own around here unless killed by cold temperatures

-Pull and store and replant these bulbs if you want them to live for several years: anemone, ranunculus, tuberose, dahlia (they're more at risk of drowning in wet fall or winter than dying in our winter temps in my experience)

-Tulips typically bloom only every few years as one bulb divides itself underground after blooming into several smaller ones and it then takes them a few seasons to grow big enough to bloom themselves

	Spring-Planted	Fall-Planted
Bulb	Lily	daffodil, allium, Dutch iris, muscari, tulip
Corm	Gladiolus	anemone, ranunculus
Tuber	Dahlia	peony, daylily
Rhizome	Calla lily, lily of the valley	Bearded iris

***Bulbs and corms** have very similar functions and ways of being planted and you usually plant them to a depth 2-3 times the size of the bulb.

***Rhizomes and tubers** are very similar to each other and need to be planted just beneath the surface of the soil; if they are planted too deep they will rot.

Fast Five Chart

a starting point for some of the primary functions of or types of flowers that we grow at the farm and love

Easy for Beginners	Edible	Pollinator Attractant	Poisonous	Perennials/ Biennials
Bachelor Button	Bachelor Button	Ammi Queen Anne's Lace	Delphinium	Feverfew
Dutch Iris	Calendula	Marigold, "single" petal type	Euphorbia* 'Snow on the Mountain'	Mountain Mint
Marigold	Nasturtium	Mountain Mint	Foxglove	Peony
Sunflower	Pansy/Viola	Oregano	Larkspur	Rudbeckia triloba
Zinnia	Sweet William	Yarrow	Milkweed*	Yarrow

*poisonous as in potential dermatitis skin irritation due to sap in cut stems, be careful when harvesting; others poisonous if ingested

Growing Needs

Helpful tools

- Favorite type of digger for planting
- Weatherproof stakes and/or labels (*plus a written map and photographs to help you know where you planted seeds when you're still learning what seedlings look like*)
- Gardening gloves
- Lightweight snips for annuals & herbaceous perennials
- Heavier snips for woody branches
- Seed starting supplies as needed - too much to elaborate on here, stop by and see us! :) Also check out our "Renfrow Seed Starting Series" photo album on the Renfrow Hardware Facebook page which is full of tips and information

Fertilizer

I tend to use only the standard granular Espoma Plant-Tone organic fertilizer that nearly all of our customers use in their vegetable gardens.

Young and tender seedlings started indoors will need a liquid fertilizer to boost their growth before being planted outside - we stock several options.

Many flowers, especially the annuals, will not need much, if any, fertilizer if you have healthy soil. Focus on building up new garden soil or poor soil with composted leaves and as the years go by, your fertilizer input needs will decrease. *Get your soil tested if you have never done so!*

Garden Chemicals - Yes or No?

You are not likely to need many, *if any*, pesticides or fungicides in the typical backyard flower garden. We only recommend using them as a last resort and likely just for perennials (like a peony or dahlia disease) than for short-lived annuals. If zinnias come down with powdery mildew, just ignore it and then pull up the plants when it gets too bad. You are not growing blooms for sale or to eat, so a bit of disease is generally not worth stressing about. And flower diseases will be fairly rare for y'all.

Bacillus thuringiensis (Bt) 'Caterpillar Killer' is a safe organic pesticide that only targets soft-bodied caterpillars like those who eat collards and some that eat flowers. It will also kill monarch or swallowtail caterpillars so you must weight your own personal costs and benefits.

Triple Action and **Neem Oil** are organic options to help battle aphids. All three of these chemicals are likely what you're already using in your vegetable garden.

What about Wildflower Mixes?

Wildflower mixes are ideally planted in fall and winter and will typically have a long blooming window the following year. These are typically a mixture of perennials and annuals that reseed themselves easily. These mixes often bloom just one to two varieties at a time (just like roadside wildflowers). If you're wanting more blooms all at one time you'll need to plant several from the "cool flowers" list below all together, or several warm-season annuals, or several short-lived herbaceous perennials (yarrow, feverfew, rudbeckia, veronica) that all bloom in groups with more similar timelines.

Seasons Come and Seasons Go

One of my FAVORITE things about flower gardening is how the different blooms mark the progression of time, especially in the spring and early summer when a new flower starts blooming practically every week and then fades away until the following year. The stars of the late summer and autumn gardens are largely more redundant from week to week, lingering much longer than the fleeting spring beauties, though no less beautiful. There are some fall-blooming perennials like Japanese anemones and obedient plant but overall the list is much shorter.

Pressly's favorite book resources

The Flower Farmer by Lynn Byczynski

Cool Flowers "How to Grow and Enjoy Long-Blooming Hardy Annual Flowers Using Cool Weather Techniques" by Lisa Mason Ziegler

Vegetables Love Flowers by Lisa Mason Ziegler

Fresh from the Field Wedding Flowers by Lynn Byczynski & Erin Benzakein