

Blooming Color This Summer

One of the advantages of living in the Southwest region is that we can have bright, colorful flowers in our community flower beds all year long. When summer brings hot temperatures, there are specific flower varieties that have adapted to the higher temperatures and alkaline soils. Specifically, choosing native plants will cost much less time, energy and money than trying to recreate flower beds from another region. Here are some tips to share with your homeowners:

Prep Your Beds

Soil preparation is essential to growing summer annuals. Plan to begin preparing beds up to two weeks ahead of planting time, usually mid-May. Make sure your planting bed is well drained. The soil in the bed should be moist enough to squeeze into a ball, but still crumble with very light pressure. If the ground is too wet, you will compact the ground as you walk on it, forcing valuable air from the soil, so try not to walk on it

Next, add organic amendments such as peat moss or compost. A variety of mulches for this purpose are generally available at a local home improvement store. Spread about a 4" layer of the mulch over the bed and mix it into a depth of 12".

Fertilizer and fungicide can be worked into the soil at the same time. Osmocote 14-14-14 is a very good, slow-release fertilizer for the summer months. It will help keep your plants greener and healthier. Subdue is a good option for fungicide. Both of these chemicals encourage plant growth while reducing the risk of fungus growing in the soil.



Pentas are a popular choice for summer annuals

Choosing Your Flowers

When your soil is ready, you can contemplate which varieties of flowers you want to plant. Dusty Miller, Pentas, Coreopsis, Celosia and 4" Lantana are some good choices that grow well in hotter temperatures, but there are many others as well. Begonias and Zinnia are best for borders around the edge of your flower beds.

At the nursery, select the healthiest plants you can find. Younger plants are generally a better choice than tall, leggy plants that have already spent a long time in the container. Remember to choose flowers that are suited to the sunlight available at the location of your flower bed (full sun, partial sun, constant shade).

Prior to planting, water the bed well. Plant when the soil is still moist, but not saturated with water. Do not plant too deep! The stem of the flowers should be at the same depth in the bed as it was in the container. You may want to carefully open the sides of the root ball with your fingers to promote quicker root growth into the soil of the bed. Water the bed well immediately after planting and continue to water daily. In some sunny spots, you may

