

## Blooming Color for the Summer

One advantage of living in the Southwest is that we can have bright, colorful flowers in our Community flower beds all year long! When summer brings the heat, there are specific flower varieties that have adapted to the higher temperatures and Arizona's alkaline soils. If you're interested in planting flowers to enjoy this summer, consider native varieties. You will most likely save lots of time, energy, and money this way rather than trying to recreate flower beds from another region.

To grow summer annuals successfully, soil preparation is essential. Plan to begin your preparation up to two weeks ahead of planting time, which is usually mid-May. Make sure your planting bed is well drained; the soil needs to be moist enough to squeeze into a ball but still able to crumble with light pressure.

Your next step will be adding organic amendments such as peat moss or compost. You can generally find mulches for this purpose at most home improvement stores. Spread a 4 inch layer of mulch over the bed and mix it in to a depth of 12 inches. If your soil needs fertilizer or fungicide, now is the time to apply. An effective, slow-release fertilizer to use during the summer months is Osmocote 14-14-14. Always follow the directions for your chosen products.

Once your soil is ready, it's time to choose your flower varieties to plant. Some options that grow well in hot weather include Pentas, Dusty Miller, Coreopsis, Celosia, or 4" Lantana. Begonias and Zinnias make great borders around the edge of your flower beds!

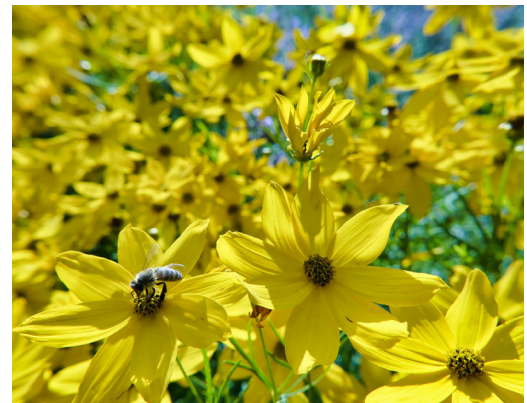
At the nursery, select the healthiest plants you can find. Younger, more-compact plants are generally better than tall, leggy plants that have already spent a long time in the container. Choose flowers that are suitable for the sun exposure that your flower bed receives; different types thrive in full sun, partial sun, or constant shade. And please note that stores often mark down flower prices after their season. Check to make sure you are buying plants that will survive the summer.

Now you're ready to plant. Water the bed well and allow it to drain prior to planting so that the soil is still moist but not saturated. Do not plant too deep! The flower stems should be at the same depth in the bed as they were in the container. You could 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 immediately after planting and continue to water daily. In particularly sunny spots, you can water more often as long as temperatures are up.

To help your flower bed thrive all season, it's best to fertilize monthly. Also, you'll need to "deadhead" the flowers as blossoms fade. Simply pinch the faded blossom off the stem right at the base of the flower. This keeps your flower bed looking fresh and promotes the growth of new blossoms.



Pentas are a beautiful and popular option for summer annuals



Coreopsis flowers

