

Caring for Annuals

Annuals are among the easiest of flowers to grow, but they'll be healthier and produce more color if you keep them in tip-top condition by properly planting and maintaining them.

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Step 1

Good soil is a necessity. Even if you've already planted your annuals, it's not too late. Spread the bed or container with a 2-inch layer of compost and work it into the top 2 or 3 inches of soil around the annuals.

Step 2

Watering annuals is critical. Don't wait for them to wilt before you water. Instead, look for signs such as loss of gloss on leaves — or simply stick your finger into the soil. Most annuals like soil that's slightly moist 2 or 3 inches down. Try to water the soil, not the plants. Many annuals, especially petunias, don't respond as well to wet leaves and petals.

Set the hose on the ground for light water pressure or use soaker hoses. As a rule, most annuals need 1 inch of water a week. Watch your rain gauge or set a sprinkler on large beds of annuals. Put small dishes in two or three areas of the bed while you water. When the containers have 1-inch of water, you will know you've given them enough for the week.

Combat drought conditions by monitoring water levels and water early on non-windy mornings to minimize evaporation. A soaker hose is a good way to get water to the roots where it's needed.

Step 3

Mulch suppresses weeds, conserves moisture and prevents many soil-borne diseases. After planting, mulch your annuals with 1 to 3 inches of aged wood chips (fresh mulch can stunt plant growth), grass clippings, pine needles, bark or other organic mulch. Don't use gravel or stone, which tends to create conditions that are too hot and dry for most annuals.

Step 4

Since annuals grow rapidly, they need plenty of fuel. Work a slow-release fertilizer into the soil at planting time. Or, as an alternative, apply a liquid fertilizer to annuals in a bed every four to six weeks and those in containers every two to four weeks.

Step 5

Encourage long blooming by pinching, snapping or cutting off dead blossoms. By cutting off the fading flower or one-third of the plant, you will ensure your annuals are healthy and properly maintained.

Courtesy of Home Depot