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# BIG BLOOMS

*Extend the life of annual flowers with special care*

by MARTY JONES



**T**HE BRIGHT BLOOMS OF annual flowers can add incredible color and interest to your landscape, but if you want to enjoy them throughout the summer season, then be prepared to give them some extra care. Unlike perennial plants, annual flowers complete their entire life cycle in one season. They'll sprout from seed, grow, flower, sow seeds and die all before the snow

returns here for another winter.

Showy and vibrant, annual flowers can add an extra pop of color to almost any location. They're often planted in hanging baskets, window boxes, exterior planters, gardens and landscapes to create stunning colorful displays. During their brief lifetime, annuals add major flower power to this area's landscapes and gardens, and if you want to experience their beauty





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“DEADHEADING IS LIKE HOUSE CLEANING, AS IT KEEPS THINGS LOOKING GOOD, BUT IT ALSO HELPS PROLONG THE LIFE OF ANNUAL PLANTS.”

through August and beyond, then take the time to fertilize plants appropriately and to deadhead spent blooms in order to promote ongoing flowering. Here's how to manage these two key tasks that can help extend the life of your annual flowers:

#### **Deadheading Annual Flowers**

Deadheading simply involves removing dead flower blossoms, and this task is essential if you'd like to keep your annuals blooming. Deadheading is like house cleaning, as it keeps things looking good, but it also helps prolong the life of annual plants. When blossoms die, that part of the plant begins its seed production cycle. And when plants begin to produce seed, they put their energy toward the seed production process instead of putting it toward producing more colorful blooms. In order to keep most

flowering plants from moving into the seed production cycle after a flower has past its prime, cut or pinch back the flower stem below the spent bloom but above the next set of leaves. Most, but not all annuals can be deadheaded in this way, and while you may be tempted to simply pull off the dead blooms, it's important to cut the flower stem back to keep the flower from seeding. Some flowering annual plants can be deadheaded collectively by cutting off the top few inches of the entire plant instead of cutting back one bloom at a time. Please come in and consult with our gardening experts at Wildflower Farm for specific deadheading questions.

#### **Fertilizing Annual Flowers**

Since annual flowers produce all of their blooms in one season, it's important to fertilize



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them if you want to keep them blooming throughout the summer. Annual-appropriate fertilizers come in granular or liquid varieties, and they generally contain the three key nutrients that plants need--nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium--in addition to other secondary nutrients. A variety of natural and organic fertilizers are available, and fertilizers that contain organic elements such as earthworm castings, bat guano, and others are good, environmentally conscious choices.

Consult with garden experts about the type of fertilizer that may be best for your application, and adopt a regular fertilization routine of every 7 to 10 days. Fertilizing too much can be more harmful than fertilizing too little, as it can cause plants to grow too quickly and leave them weak or susceptible to disease. Read directions on fertilizer containers, and you'll likely find that weekly applications are appropriate, so choose one day that you'll remember, and stick with it.

“SET ASIDE SOME TIME DAILY TO CARE FOR PLANTS, AND THEY’LL RETURN YOUR EFFORT WITH LASTING, COLORFUL BLOOMS.”

While fertilizing annual flowers takes little more time than it takes to water them, deadheading requires more regular time and effort. Instead of waiting until your plant is full of wilting blooms and spindly stems, set aside some time daily to care for plants, and they'll return your effort with lasting, colorful blooms throughout their showy summer season. **END**



Marty Janes is the owner and manager of Colorado Alpines & Wildflower Farm in Edwards. Marty has lived in the Vail area since 1973, and his work with Colorado Alpines & Wildflower Farm has inspired extraordinary landscapes and gardens in the Vail Valley and beyond. Marty can be reached at [marty@thewildflowerfarm.com](mailto:marty@thewildflowerfarm.com).