

Make sure to get right plant in the right place

May 11th, 2011

The second week of May is prime time to start planting pots, containers and garden beds with annuals, perennials and container garden plants. In some areas the soil may still be too cold for heat-loving coleus, tomatoes, basil and squash starts.

Getting creative with container gardens is as easy as strolling through the aisles at a local nursery and mixing colors in your cart like paint dabs on a palette. The only important part of the creative process is putting the right plant in the right place. Most flowering and foliage plants adapt to partial shade or a mostly sunny situation in our climate, but everyone will grow happy if you learn their personal preferences and just group like plants together.

Best container color for the shade: Use these plants in hanging baskets, pots or flower gardens under trees or the north or east side of the house.

Choose lobelia, impatiens, begonias – both the tuberous and fibrous begonias – coleus, heuchera, hosta, pansies, fuchsias and any other plants marked for shade or partial shade.

Dirt cheap bargain for the shade: Buy impatiens and wax begonias by the flat or in six-packs. Mix and match colors and varieties – but be sure to water, fertilize and protect the small plants. They'll spread out and fill your shaded spaces in just a few weeks.

If you need hanging plants to spill over your shaded baskets or pots, consider using groundcover plants that will survive the winter and be ready to use in pots year after year. Creeping Charley, lamiums and variegated ivy are all shade-loving foliage plants that will add color and texture to your containers year after year.

Best container color for the hot sun: Use these plants if your pots or baskets get a blast of hot afternoon sun and heat reflected from walls or concrete walkways.

Plant ivy geraniums, marigolds, sedums, succulents, petunias, supertunias, lantanas, licorice plant, scaevola, icicles, sage, calibrachoa or million bells, lavender and most plants that have gray, thick or succulent foliage.

If you want maximum summer flowers in a sunny spot, I vote for the continuous blooms of ivy geraniums or the petunia family. New varieties of mini petunias (million bells, superbells, the wave petunia) means filling your landscape with summer long color is easier than ever before.

Dirt cheap color for the sun: Invest in flats of heat-loving petunias that have groundcover growth habits. Plant directly into well-worked soil that has been amended with compost and a slow-release plant food. Then be sure to fertilize all summer long using a liquid plant food that can be applied directly to the roots and foliage of the plants.

Annual plants that flower freely all summer need a constant supply of food and moisture.

To guarantee your fertilizer investment, you must read and follow the directions on the label. (This may involve putting on your glasses, reading the small print and actually measuring out the plant food the first time you use it.)

- Don't drown your potted plants!

In early May and June the cool weather puts many annuals into a state of rest. They do not need as much moisture, especially when nights are still cold and the plants are still young.

Poke a bare finger into the potting soil and don't water until the top 2 inches is dry to the touch. Then water until you see the excess pouring from the drainage holes. Once a week may be enough water for potted plants in May, but the same container may need water every day in August and September. You have to feel the soil to avoid giving too much or too little water.

Marianne Binetti is the author of "Easy Answers for Great Gardens" and eight other gardening books. She will answer questions from her website at www.binettigarden.com.

Meet Marianne

Marianne Binetti will speak at 1 p.m. Sunday at the Olympia Master Builders Home and Garden Show in Elma. Her topic is "Artists and Art in the Garden: Inspiration from Monet's garden." The event is free. Visit www.OMB.org for more information.

Read more: <http://www.thenewstribune.com/2011/05/11/v-printerfriendly/1660575/make-sure-to-get-right-plant-in.html#ixzz1QVnM6dqi>