

BIRDS & BLOOMS

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No Deadheading Zone

With these seven no-maintenance annuals, you'll have lots of time to kick back and enjoy.

Annuals are an instant hit with busy gardeners. That's because a few flats of colorful annuals can make any yard look like a million bucks in no time at all.

Like other garden plants, however, some annuals require more care than time-challenged green thumbs can afford to give. On top of basic watering, fertilizing and weeding chores, geraniums, petunias and salvia, for example, need deadheading (removing flowers as they begin to fade) to keep them blooming rather than going to seed.



For the gardener who wants less work and more enjoyment, there's still hope. You can have an easy-to-maintain kaleidoscope of color with these seven annuals that keep giving, yet ask for little to nothing in return.

Wax begonia

These brightly colored plants have small flowers in shades of pink, red, salmon and white with bright yellow "eyes". Their thick glossy foliage also comes in a range of colors, from dark green to a more sun-tolerant bronze.

Wax begonia, also commonly called fibrous and ever-blooming begonia, is at the top of my no-fuss list—the only thing I need to give them is water. Even then, I can let the soil dry between waterings in shade.

They grow well in partial to full shade and flourish in borders, mixed plantings and containers. They also are a nice plant to combine with other cool-colored flowers, such as purple, green and blue.

Wax begonia (*Begonia semperflorens*):

Size: 6 to 12 inches tall and wide.

Flowers: White, red, pink and salmon.

Bloom period: Summer to first frost.

Light: Partial to full sun.

Soil: Moist and well-draining.

Additional benefits: Attracts hummingbirds.

Impatiens

If you have a shady area that needs color, impatiens are a no-brainer. They've made me look like a Master Gardener without me even trying, and can do the same for you.

Native to Africa, these popular plants were stowaways on trading ships and became naturalized in Central and South America. Today, breeders have developed impatiens that bloom in almost every color imaginable.

Their leaves are green to bronze, and the single or double flowers create continuous color in shady beds, borders, hanging baskets and containers. You'll get the most from your plants with sufficient water and fertilizer.

Impatiens (*Impatiens walleriana*):

Size: 6 to 18 inches tall; 12 to 24 inches wide.

Flowers: A broad variety of colors, including white, orange, red, pink, lavender, coral and yellow.

Bloom period: Summer to first frost.

Light: Partial to full shade.

Soil: Moist and well-draining.

Additional benefits: Attracts butterflies and hummingbirds.

Melampodium

This vigorous drought-tolerant plant caught my eye because it produces masses of small daisy-like blooms. The beauty is that it flowers continuously right into fall.

Melampodium is a native to Mexico and Central America, making it an ideal choice for gardens like mine that have lots of humidity and heat during the summer months. It's dark-green leaves and abundant yellow flowers brighten beds, borders and containers. All the plant requires is plenty of sunshine and well-draining soil.

Melampodium (*Melampodium paludosum*):

Size: 18 inches tall.

Flowers: Deep yellow.

Bloom period: Summer into fall.

Light: Full sun.

Soil: Well-draining.

Additional benefits: Drought tolerant.

Flowering Tobacco

This relative of the tobacco plant is also known as nicotiana. The stems rise from a rosette of leaves and are covered with star-shaped flowers in shades of pink, red, maroon, lavender, white, yellow and green.

Many varieties produce fragrant blooms all season long on tall stems that sway in the breeze. They're also a nice backdrop when planted in clusters beyond border plants.

Flowering tobacco is an excellent plant to attract hummingbirds and butterflies, livening up your no-fuss garden.

Flowering tobacco (*Nicotiana alata*):

Size: 10 inches to 5 feet tall; 6 to 24 inches wide.

Flowers: White, red, pink, lavender, green and yellow.

Bloom period: Summer to first frost.

Light: Partial shade to full sun.



Soil: Rich, moist and well-draining.

Additional benefits: Attracts butterflies and hummingbirds.

Annual Vinca

If you experience lots of heat in summer, annual vinca, also known as Madagascar periwinkle, is the perfect plant. It flourishes in full sun and doesn't need excessive watering or deadheading.

An upright plant that spreads with age, it's perfect in the garden or as a container planting. Its heat tolerance and appearance make annual vinca a perfect substitute for impatiens in hot dry locations.

The glossy green foliage makes a nice backdrop for the solid or bicolor flowers. Bring the plants or cuttings indoors over winter for a windowsill of blossoms.



Annual vinca (*Catharanthus roseus*):

Size: 6 to 24 inches tall and wide.

Flowers: White, pink, rose-pink, red lilac and some with a contrasting eye.

Bloom period: Early summer.

Light: Full sun.

Soil: Well-draining.

Additional benefits: Drought tolerant.

Sweet Alyssum

Believe it or not, this beautiful low-growing border plant covered with clusters of delicate little flowers is a member of the mustard family. Its tiny blooms are fragrant and come in white, pink and lavender hues.

I love this annual because it blooms for months in full sun to partial shade. It does best in cool weather. After the heat of summer, cut it back to encourage new growth and blooms. It also works nicely in rock gardens and containers.

Sweet Alyssum (*Lobularia maritima*):

Size: 4 to 8 inches tall; 10 to 15 inches wide.

Flowers: White, pink, lavender and apricot.

Bloom period: Spring through frost.

Light: Full sun to partial shade.

Soil: Well-draining.

Additional benefits: Attracts butterflies.

Wave petunia

I have to take back what I said earlier about petunias. While most need extensive deadheading, Wave petunias and many other newer introductions seem to defy the laws of nature. They produce continuous blooms without removing the spent flowers.

These petunias make a great ground cover. They have a low-spreading habit, fanning out up to 3 feet.

Wave petunias are also perfect for hanging baskets, window boxes and large containers. They'll spill



over the edges with a cascade of purple, blue or lavender flowers.



Wave Petunia (*Petunia x hybrida* 'Wave'):

Size: 4 to 6 inches tall; spreads 3 to 4 feet wide.

Flowers: Purple, blue, lavender, lilac, pink and rose.

Bloom period: Spring through first frost.

Light: Full sun.

Soil: Well-draining.

Additional benefits: Fills in large areas.

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