

Old-fashioned? Yes. Charming? Definitely. There is an excitement in the random appearance of mixed old-fashioned flowers, and necessary care is minimal. You can create this beauty in any planting pocket that receives at least six hours of sun a day. This big splash is inexpensive and can be obtained from seeds or from seedlings purchased in flats--ready to explode with color.

Plant taller zinnias, marigolds, and a few cosmos toward the rear as a backdrop, with snapdragons and petunias midway, and pansies and ageratum up front. Use sweet williams, dahlias, violas, marigolds, and petunias for bright color all summer. For a red-gold mix, try dianthus, marigolds, asters, rudbeckias, and calendulas. Mix statice here and there for garden color and later drying. Focus on two or three colors or a soft mix of pastels.

Informality is the key to making the garden reminiscent of your grandparents'. Mix the clumps so they seem haphazard and not like an army on parade. If you grow your old-fashioned garden from seeds and buy one of the packaged mixes, you can expect to get tall and short plants in a crazy quilt pattern. To establish focus with such a blend, deliberately place other tall plants in the background, or use shrubbery for accent.

Mix the bold and the wispy in your old-fashioned border. At the far back, use spikes of hollyhock or larkspur for tall color, softened by the thin-stemmed delicacy of California or Iceland poppies. In front of giant sunflower plants, mingle some gaillardia, myosotis (forget-me-nots), and dwarf phlox with a carpet of lobelia. Informal doesn't mean total neglect, so be sure to water occasionally and remove faded flowers.