

Six Annual Flowers for Sunny Locations

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Annual flowers make a colorful addition to any landscape. The term annual means the flowers complete their life cycle in one growing season. Their versatility makes them useful in gardens since they are available in a wide range of colors and sizes. Take advantage of all the qualities annuals have to offer and present a beautiful landscape that will bloom from spring until fall. All of these annual flowers benefit pollinators.

Sweet Alyssum (*Lobularia maritima*)



Flowers: many small florets in a rounded head; flowers literally cover the branched, low-spreading plants; pure white is the most popular, but deep lavender, pink and mixtures are available. Height: 4–8 inches.

Cosmos (*Cosmos bipinnatus*)

Flowers: single or semi-double, daisy-like, 3–4 inches in diameter; wide-serrated petals



around prominent yellow center; shades of pink, rose, red, plus white and several variegated patterns and bicolors; excellent for cutting. Leaves: delicate and feathery; fresh light green color. Height: 1–3 feet.

Globe Amaranth (*Gomphrena globosa*)



Flowers: 3/4–1 inch, rounded, clover-like with papery feel; purple-red, white, pink or orange-red. Great cut flower and long-lasting bloom. Height: 10–24 inches.

Portulaca, Rose Moss (*Portulaca grandiflora*)



Flowers: 1–2 inches in diameter, rose-like; single, semi-double or double-shades of rose, salmon, pink, scarlet, orchid, yellow, orange, white and some striped; newer cultivars have large, double flowers. Height: 2–5 inches.

Blue Salvia (*Salvia farinacea*)



Flowers: on slender spikes; individual flowers small, lipped; colors range from white through deep blue-lavender. Height: 10–16 inches.

Zinnia (*Zinnia elegans*)



Flowers: 1–3 inches in diameter; wide range of colors from white, cream, yellow, orange, red, pink, rose, violet, white and even green; also multicolored and striped cultivars; usually fully double; petals usually flat, but sometimes curled, quilled or twisted. Height: 6 inches–2 feet.

Photos: Mary Jane Frogge, Nebraska Extension in Lancaster County



GARDEN GUIDE

THINGS TO DO THIS MONTH

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Consider planting native perennials beneficial to native pollinators like solitary bees, bumblebees and butterflies. Native plants include coreopsis, coneflower, aster, liatris, goldenrod, pasque flower, butterfly milkweed, pitcher sage, bee balm and purple poppy mallow.

Cut flower stalks back to the ground on daffodils, hyacinths and other spring flowering bulbs as the flowers fade. Do not cut the foliage until it dies naturally. The leaves are necessary to produce strong bulbs capable of reflowering next year.

The last Friday in April is National Arbor Day. Plant a tree or support an organization which plants trees.

Prune spring-blooming shrubs such as forsythia and spirea after they have completed flowering.

Measure the rainfall with a rain gauge posted near the garden so you can tell when to water. The garden needs about one inch of rain per week from April to September.

Do not add organic matter to the soil when planting trees. It does not help the plant become established and it may create conditions that encourage the roots to stay inside the planting hole instead of spreading to surrounding soil. Do dig a large planting hole, but fill it with the original soil removed from it.

Do not restrict yourself to buying plants in bloom. Petunias that bloom in the pack are often rootbound or overgrown and after planting will actually be set back and cease to bloom for about a month. Plants without blossoms will actually bloom sooner and will grow better as well.

To extend the blooming period of gladiolus, plant early, middle and late-season selections each week until the middle of June. Choose a sunny location and plant the corms 4–6 inches deep and 6–8 inches apart.

Seed bare spots in your fescue or bluegrass lawn.

Scatter annual poppy seeds in flower borders. The fine seeds need not be covered. The plants grow rapidly and provide colorful flowers in early summer.

In a sunny location with poor soil, plant nasturtiums for a colorful show. They require warm soil to sprout and start blooming in about 50 days. Too much water and fertilizer produces excess leaves and few flowers.

Hiring a Lawn & Landscape Professional

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Caring for a lawn and landscape is a lot of work! Mowing, fertilizing, seeding and weed control in a lawn; along with planting, pruning and pest management in trees and landscape areas requires more time than many homeowners have available or the equipment to accomplish. Plus, the identification of weeds and pests often needs a professional's knowledge.

If you would rather not perform any or all of these tasks, you have the option to hire a professional to do the work for you. How can you evaluate services offered by professionals or hire a good professional to work in your landscape? Below are two important aspects of professionalism to be aware of when hiring a landscape professional.

Licensing & Certification

Pesticide Applicators

License — All lawn, tree and landscape professionals applying pesticides FOR HIRE — including weed, insect or disease control products — on another person's property must be a certified pesticide applicator and have a license issued through the Nebraska Department of Agriculture. The ornamental and turf category, in which all turf, tree and landscape professionals are certified, requires applicators have a license for the use of BOTH general and restricted-use products. So it doesn't matter if the person applies a product homeowners can buy at

their local nursery, the professional still must have a pesticide applicators license to make the application. Landscape professionals do not need a license to apply fertilizer as long as the product does not include any pesticide products, such as a pre-emergent herbicide.

Certified pesticide applicators attend training every three years to keep their license current. Training keeps them current on changes in pesticides or their applications, and reinforces the applicator's knowledge of identifying pest problems. Applicators are required to carry their license with them whenever they are making applications, so ask to see it.

Municipal Arborist License

Many cities and towns, including Lincoln, require professionals providing tree services for hire to be licensed with the city. To obtain a license, tree workers must pass a written test administered by the Lincoln Parks & Recreation Department or provide proof they are a certified arborist with the Nebraska Arborists Association and/or the International Society of Arboriculture.

In Lincoln, before obtaining a municipal arborist license, arborists must also comply with the city's insurance requirements. Always ask any potential professional to provide proof of insurance.

Professional Certifications

— Even for those living in the country or in a town that doesn't have municipal arborist licensing requirements, it's always a good idea to look for professionals certified through the Nebraska Arborist Association or International Society of Arboriculture. These organizations

require applicants to pass a rigorous written test on a broad range of arboriculture topics, such as tree identification, planting, pruning, fertilization and pest control, to obtain certification. Certified arborists must regularly attend continuing education programs to maintain their certification status.

Other certifications to look for include the Nebraska Nursery & Landscape Association, which administers the certified nurseryman program. Nebraska Turfgrass Association members are connected to the latest University of Nebraska Turfgrass Research Program information. Membership in any of these professional organizations indicates a higher level of commitment to the industry and a more knowledgeable professional.

Knowledge & Expertise

Whether you're investigating a new company or have been working with a company for several years, they should always be able to explain why they are recommending certain applications or management strategies and what results you should expect to see in your landscape.

Too often homeowners don't understand the applications being used in their landscapes, so don't be afraid to ask! If you still don't understand the need for the recommended applications, contact the Extension office for help understanding what's being recommended.



An example of a Nebraska pesticide applicators license, provided by the Nebraska Department of Agriculture.

Finally, professionals should always keep protection of the environment as a core goal. Keep these thoughts in mind.

- Professionals should never use pesticides in a manner not listed on the product label. The label is the law. Not following label recommendations is illegal and indicates a lack of professionalism.
- When only low levels of weeds occur in your lawn or landscape, your professional should recommend spot-treating, instead of broadcasting products throughout the entire area.
- Your lawn professional should recommend watering practices geared toward conserving water, while still encouraging good turf root development for a healthy lawn.
- Fertilizers and pesticides should always be precisely applied. If granular fertilizer, pesticides or grass clippings get onto sidewalks, driveways or in roadways, they must be swept back into the lawn to reduce potential impacts on water quality.