

# Quick reference guide for easy annual and perennial flowers

by Robin Mittenthal, January 2009

**Notes about this guide:**

- 1) This guide is a small section of a book-length manual for beginning gardeners called From the Ground Up. The manual includes more information about how to grow the crops discussed here, as well as general explanations of fertilizer, compost, weed management, and other related topics. It is available for free online at the following address: [http://www.eagleheightsgardens.org/tips/garden\\_manual\\_v\\_1.1.pdf](http://www.eagleheightsgardens.org/tips/garden_manual_v_1.1.pdf)
- 2) This guide often refers to planting cold-sensitive flowers in the spring or early summer "after danger of frost has passed." In southern Wisconsin and other areas in zone 4 of the United States Department of Agriculture's Zone Map, average last frost date in the spring ranges from May 1 to May 30. If you are located outside this zone, you should try to find locally appropriate dates (look online or talk to a horticulture extension staff person at the nearest state university), but you can also try to adjust by allowing six days difference for every 160 km (100 mi) of latitude you are away from Madison, Wisconsin. North, plant later; south, plant earlier. If you are wondering when cold might kill your plants in the fall, average first frost date in zone 4 ranges from September 1 to September 30
- 3) Note that planting dates in many cases refer to transplants and *not* seeds. Transplants must be started substantially earlier, either indoors or in a small greenhouse called a cold frame. You can also buy transplants of most of these herbs at local garden stores and farmers' markets.

<b>Annual Flowers</b>						
<b>Annual Flower (and alternate name or names)</b>	<b>Variety or varieties to try</b>	<b>Plant as seeds, bulbs, or transplants?</b>	<b>Possible planting date(s)</b>	<b>Depth to Plant</b>	<b>Distance apart in row</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Ageratum	Blue Horizon, Florist's White	Transplants	After danger of frost has passed	Match depth in pot to ground level.	30 cm/ 12 in	Start plants inside from seed two months before last frost date or buy plants later.
Amaranth	Love Lies Bleeding,	Seed	After danger of frost has passed	Cover seeds very lightly with soil.	30-45 cm/ 12-18 in	Leaves and seeds are edible (some varieties taste better than others)
Bachelor's button (Centaurea)	Blue Boy	Seed	Plant in fall or early in the spring; can be seeded several times at intervals to provide a longer flowering season	Cover seeds very lightly with soil.	15-25 cm/6-10 in	Dries well.
Cosmos	Cosmic Yellow, Sea Shells, Sensation Mix, Versailles, Imperial	Seed	After danger of frost has passed	0.5 cm/0.25 in	20-30 cm/8-12 in	Cut regularly to keep plants producing.
Celosia	Chief Mix, Cramers, Bombay	Seed or transplant	Two weeks after danger of frost has passed	Cover seeds very lightly with soil or match depth in pot to ground level.	30-45 cm/ 12-18 in	Dries well.
Dahlia	Rigoletto	Transplants or bulbs	After danger of frost has passed	Plant bulbs at a depth equal to 2 or 3 times the width of the bulb. For transplants, match depth in pot to ground level.	60 cm/24 in	Dahlias are actually perennials, but the bulbs will usually not survive northern winters unless you dig them out, let them dry, and store them at 4-10 C (40-50 F) over the winter.

## Annual Flowers (Continued)

Annual Flower (and alternate name or names)	Variety or varieties to try	Plant as seeds, bulbs, or transplants?	Possible planting date(s)	Depth to Plant	Distance apart in row	Notes
Larkspur (Consolida)	Giant Imperial Mix, Sublime Mix	Seed	Plant in fall or as early in spring as you can get in the garden; seeds <i>must</i> be exposed to six or more weeks at temperatures below 12 C/ 55 F	Cover seeds very lightly with soil	25-30 cm/ 10-12 in	Produces many pretty flowers. Dries well. You may see transplants, but avoid them – larkspur doesn't transplant well.
Marigold	Gold Coin Mix, Queen Sophia, Brocade Mix, Jubilee	Seed or transplant	Plant 2 weeks before last frost; may want to put in a second planting after frost	0.5 cm/0.25 in	Small varieties can go 15-20 cm/6-8 in apart, larger varieties 30-45 cm/12-18 in apart	Marigolds are pretty and can also repel nematodes (see <b>pests</b> ) if planted around tomatoes and other vegetables.
Nasturtium	Jewel Mix, Alaska Mix, Empress of India	Seed	Plant one or more weeks after last frost	1.3 cm/0.5 in; keep moist	Plant groups of 3 or 4 seeds 30 cm/12 in apart	Flowers are edible and pretty in salads.
Salvia	Caraviniere Red, Victoria Blue, Oxford Blue, Pink Sundae	Transplant	After danger of frost has passed	Match depth in pot to ground level.	30-90 cm/12-36 in (Some varieties are very large, others small)	Can be dried. Plant size and color vary widely.
Snapdragon (Antirrhinum)	Rocket, Liberty	Transplant	Plants are cold tolerant and can be transplanted up to a month before the last frost if protected with a floating row cover; otherwise wait until after frost	Match depth in pot to ground level.	22-30 cm/9-12 in	Produces many pretty flowers.
Statice	Anything that's available (try a mix)	Transplant	After danger of frost has passed	Match depth in pot to ground level.	30 cm/12 in	Excellent for drying.
Sunflower	Autumn Beauty, Joker, Mammoth, Prado Gold, Selma Suns, Sunbright; if possible, find out how big the variety you buy will get – heights range from 60 cm to 3 m (2-10 ft)	Seed or transplant (young plants only – older plants may not transplant well)	After danger of frost has passed	2.5 cm/1 in; keep moist after seeding	22-30 cm/9-12 in (some varieties grow very, very tall but are not very wide, so they can still be planted close together)	Some varieties (esp. Sunbright) can be dried. Leave the sunflowers in the garden after the flowers are gone; the seeds will feed migrating birds.

## Annual Flowers (Continued)

Annual Flower (and alternate name or names)	Variety or varieties to try	Plant as seeds, bulbs, or transplants?	Possible planting date(s)	Depth to Plant	Distance apart in row	Notes
Zinnia	Benary's Giant Mix, Cactus Bright Jewel Mix, State Fair Mix, Oklahoma	Seed	After danger of frost has passed; can put in two successive plantings about 4-6 weeks apart to have flowers for months.	Cover seeds very lightly with soil	15-30 cm/6-12 in	One of the most beautiful, productive, and reliable of flowers. Most mixes include many bright, wonderful colors.

## Perennial Flowers

Aster, New England	Anything that's available	Transplant	After danger of frost has passed	Match depth in pot to ground level.	60 cm/24 in	This prairie native does well in the Midwest. Plants that get large can be divided every three years or so.
Coneflower (Echinacea)	Magnus, Bright Star (or anything that's available)	Seed or transplant (plants grow readily but slowly from seed and may not flower the first year)	Can seed in late fall or early spring (before last frost) or transplant in early spring (before last frost)	Cover seeds very lightly with soil (seed thickly, as some will not grow) or match depth in pot to ground level.	60 cm/24 in	Varieties may be white, pink, or purple. This prairie native does well in the Midwest. Plants that get large can be divided every three years or so.
Daffodil (Narcissus)	Choose varieties based on pictures and descriptions – flowers vary a lot	Bulbs	Plant in fall (October-November)	15 cm/6 in	15 cm/6 in	Daffodil stems have sap that is harmful to other flowers – do not mix them with others in a vase. Cut flowers before they open for longest flower life.
Daisy	Any variety – choose based on color and size	Seed or transplant	Plant seeds in the fall or early spring (before last frost); transplant any time after the last frost	Place seeds on soil surface or match depth in pot to ground level.	30-60 cm/12-24 in	Keep an eye on these plants, as they can spread and take over your garden! Dig some of them out if this starts to happen.
Delphinium	Belladonna, Aurora, Pacific Giant	Seeds or transplants	Plant seeds or transplants in fall; they need cool weather to get established.			Delphiniums do not do well in hot weather. Mulch around their roots and water regularly. Can be dried.
Gypsophila (Babies' Breath)	Snow fountain, Covent, Garden Market, or any other <i>perennial</i> variety available locally	Seed	Plant in the spring after danger of frost has passed, and (if you like it a lot) put in more at intervals of one or more weeks.	Cover seeds very lightly with soil. Keep moist.	Seed thickly, then thin to 25 cm/10 in as plants grow	There is an annual type as well as the perennial type. Both are pretty, but make sure to buy the perennial if it's what you want. Can be dried.
Foxgloves (Digitalis)	Foxy Mix	Seeds or transplants	Plant transplants in spring or seeds in late summer or fall (Sept.-Oct.)	Cover seeds lightly with soil. Keep moist.	45 cm/18 in	Usually does not flower the first year it is planted. Plants that get large can be divided every three years or so.

## Perennial Flowers (Continued)

Iris	Any variety – choose based on color and size	Bulbs	Early fall (September) or early spring (late March or April)	2.5 cm/1 in	8-15 cm/3-6 in	There are several different types of irises that look very different from each other. Removing dead flowers is very important to encourage more.
Liatris (Blazing Star, Gay-feather)	Any variety – choose based on color and size	Plants or bulbs (also called “corms”)	Spring or fall	Plant bulbs 5-8 cm/2-3 in deep or match depth in pot to ground level	15-20 cm/6-8 in	This prairie native does well in the Midwest.
Monarda (Bee Balm, Horse Mint)	Lambada, Panorama	Transplants	Spring or early summer	Match depth in pot to ground level.	45 cm/ 18 in	This prairie native does well in the Midwest.
Peony	Any variety available locally	Bulbs (roots, really); use roots with at least three “eyes” (growing points) each	Plant in the fall or early spring (before last frost)	Plant roots so eyes are 5 cm/2 in below the soil surface	120 cm/48 in	Plants can get very large! May not flower until the third year.
Rudbeckia (Black-eyed Susan)	Goldsturm or any other <i>perennial</i> variety available locally	Seeds or transplants	Plant seed 2-4 weeks before last frost date. Plant transplants in the spring after frost.	Place seeds on soil surface – do not cover with soil at all. For transplants, match depth in pot to ground level.	45 cm/18 in	There is an annual type as well as the perennial type. Both are pretty, but make sure to buy the perennial if it's what you want. Can be dried. Can divide large plants after 3-4 years.
Tulip	Any variety available locally	Bulbs	Plant in fall (October-November)	15 cm/6 in	15 cm/6 in	The petals are edible and pretty in salads.
Yarrow (Achillea)	Cerise Queen, Colorado	Transplants	May-June	Match depth in pot to ground level.	45 cm/18 in	A very tough plant.



A zinnia, one of the easiest annual flowers to grow. Drawing by Pearson Foresman (from Wikimedia.org).