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Annual Versus Perennial Flowers

Comparing annual and perennial flowers is a little like comparing apples and oranges. Each type of flower has its own characteristics and advantages.

Annual flowers are those that complete their lifecycle in just one growing season. In other words, you plant a seed (or a seedling plant), it grows foliage, then flowers, seeds and then the plant dies, all in the same year. Annual flowers tend to bloom from spring until autumn frost. Although they must be replanted each year, annuals are hard to beat in terms of showy, season-long color.

Popular annual flowers include petunias, marigolds, zinnias and impatiens. If you're looking for something a little more exotic than these traditional bedding plants, try spider flower (*Cleome*), gazania, vinca (*Catharanthus*) and lisianthus (*Eustoma*). Some annuals are grown for their attractive foliage rather than flowers, including coleus, Joseph's coat and snow-on-the-mountain. You can add some edible interest with ornamental peppers, flowering cabbage and okra.

Perennial flowers are those that grow for three or more years. Although most perennials tend to have a relatively short season of bloom, combining several species in your planting can yield season-long color.

There is no end to the colors, textures and sizes available in perennial plants. Some of the most popular perennials include daylilies, hosta, peonies and garden mums. For a spikey show of blue, try blazing star (*Liatris*). Or for a delicate bouquet of yellow, try coreopsis 'Moonbeam.' For dramatic late-season color, try black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia*) and purple coneflower (*Echinacea*).

Can't decide whether to plant annuals or perennials? No need to pick one or the other. Annuals and perennials can be combined in your planting design to reap the best of both!

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