



Abundant Summer Petals

Long-Blooming Garden Flowers

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Written by G. Edwin Varner.

Preface

This ebook showcases selected garden plants that offer abundant, colorful flowers and uninterrupted enjoyment from early summer until the first fall frost.

The information for each plant may contain inaccuracies regarding its USDA hardiness zones, ideal growing conditions, and recommended varieties. Please be aware that these plants may not be available, may be discontinued, or may be replaced with better varieties by nurseries. Some are so rare we may never find them.

The following list of plants lists their Latin name first, then their common name(s).

Please note: I have copied pertinent information from my previous ebooks, corrected known mistakes, including minor grammatical and spelling errors, and added new material to this ebook.

The digital photos are from my home, public gardens, many nurseries within my area, and Creative Commons (CC0) licensed images.

Introduction

Let's face it — every home flower gardener wishes to grow those ideal plants that flower abundantly throughout the summer, and, hopefully, well into the fall. That can be a challenging request, but it can be done. Fortunately, this ebook can help you select plants that will make your beds and borders look outstanding for several months.

Many of the following plants are annuals; a few are perennials. Annuals are designed for abundant, colorful flowering, with the ultimate goal of seed production. If you are destined to live only one growing season, party-hearty with colorful blossoms while the good growing time remains!

Perennials, though, have the critical balance of forming limited flowers (and thus seeds) and conserving enough energy to live again for another year. There may not be many examples of long-blooming perennials, but some are available for your garden.

None of these plants is automatic in perpetual blooming. They do require periodic spent-flower clipping to prevent excessive seed formation, which robs the energy needed to create new blossoms. Also, occasional watering and nutrient fertilization are vital for boosting your plants' overall health and blooming potential.

Many of the following plants have a vast selection of colorful varieties. Other listed plants are less common, some rare, and you should grow them not only for their uniqueness but also for their delightfully colorful blossoms. Be daring and let your gardening talents be noticed all summer long.

To find plants or seeds of the following species and varieties, please visit nearby larger garden centers or search online for specialty nurseries that grow and sell them.

Ageratum — Floss Flower

Ageratum houstonianum



This plant needs a better public relations agent. It also requires a press agent to get the word out that it makes a great bedding display and border edger. What matters most is that it is one of the few annuals considered to have true-blue flower representatives. Even though some varieties are pink or white, the powdery, grayish-blue to lavender-blue and “almost” purple flowers are the most popular. The flowers are globular, with fluffy, fuzzy, or furry petals, and vary in scent intensity.

Many gardeners overlook that this plant is part of the daisy family, native to Central America and extending into parts of South America. While most varieties grow short, some grow taller, making ideal, if unusual, cut flowers for attention-getting displays.

Quickly grown by seed, the plants bloom by late spring until the first fall frost.

Breeders and growers developed a few varieties highlighting different shades of blue blossoms. Larger online nurseries and garden centers offer them as bedding plants for spring sales. Look for **Blue Blazer**, an older hybrid still available, which has a uniform, low-growing habit and excellent blueness. Other recent hybrids include **Blue Carpet** (its growth reliably mimics the name) and **Blue Danube**, considered the best for early blooming, uniform low growth, and a gorgeous, deeper blue color.

Regardless of variety, all *Ageratum* plants require fertile, well-drained soil and full sun to partial shade. Most types may need periodic trimming of spent brown flower clusters to maintain their best appearance. Adding an occasional jolt of fertilizer each month will overflow your flower garden with spectacular blueness.

You can find most varieties as seeds or potted plants at many nurseries and garden centers. It's time to stop overlooking these beauties and start incorporating them into your garden. Let's end this unfortunate neglect and bring the *Ageratum* plant into the spotlight it deserves.

Alonsoa — Mask Flower

Alonsoa meridionalis



Are you looking for a red flowering annual with vivid, exciting, stupendous, surprising, and other thrilling descriptive words? Look no further.

This “bloom machine” hails from South America, near Peru. If you live in zone 9 or higher, it is a perennial. All other areas subject to cold conditions must be classified as annual. But it still grows well from seed, giving a wowzer display throughout the summer.

It is a distant cousin of our regularly grown snapdragons, though it is sometimes difficult to see the resemblance. The leaves are dark green,

and the slender stems hold clusters of one-inch red blossoms. The plants grow to almost two feet tall and are bushy.

Plant these beauties near the front of the border or even in containers. They love as much sunlight as possible and fertile, well-drained soil. They can look messy by mid to late summer, but don't worry. Clip them back by half, and they will be re-blooming within two weeks.

Seeds and plants are difficult to find, but large online nurseries specializing in rare plants may carry them. If you find some seeds, sow them indoors about 6 to 8 weeks before the expected last spring frost, then transplant them outdoors after the frost danger has passed.

Angelonia

Angelonia angustifolia



A relative of our common *Antirrhinum* or snapdragon, this beautiful plant is native from Mexico to Argentina. They are perennial growers there, but elsewhere they are fast-growing, long-blooming annuals.

Angelonia is the “new flowering kid on the block,” as it first appeared in garden centers in the late 1990s. They were spindly things with small, unattractive, wide-spaced flowers, and gardeners were not impressed with them. But breeders considered that they had significant improvement potential. They were correct in their assessment. Since then, growers have supplied garden centers with many outstanding, colorful, ever-blooming varieties.

Flower colors range from blue to purple, with some varieties having pink or white petals. Some types have brilliant eye-catching bi-coloring. Another remarkable quality of these plants is their foliage. When handled, the leaves smell of apples or grapes! What we have here is a delightful multitasking plant.

This plant prefers full sunlight and well-drained, fertile soil in containers, beds, or borders. Treat it like regular snapdragons, and it will provide you with summer-long enjoyment. Occasionally, clip off spent flower spikes to encourage fresh growth and new blossoms, promoting continuous blooming.

Antirrhinum — Snapdragon

Antirrhinum majus



Of all the plants that have undergone so many physical changes, none is more popular than this annual. Historically, different countries have had unique interpretations of what a snapdragon flower resembles. Oriental cultures view a blossom as the head and jaws of a dragon or as a less menacing goldfish mouth. I would hate to encounter a roaring, fire-breathing goldfish.

Other Asian societies believe the flowers resemble rabbit lips (I guarantee you will be thinking about that all day). In Northern Europe, the blossom resembles a lion's roaring mouth—my goodness. Floral interpretations of the mouths of dragons, goldfish, rabbits, and lions are

reminiscent of a bizarre Rorschach psychological test. Instead of analyzing unusual inkblot images, use snapdragon flowers.

Breeders have made most snapdragons more “open-mouthed” and have placed a greater emphasis on developing dwarf varieties. This may indicate that many gardeners do not have large beds or borders for taller varieties, so they grow shorter types in containers. They look attractive when blooming, and it is convenient to move the pots around to find the perfect spot to highlight them.

All snapdragons need to grow in plenty of sunlight, fertile, well-drained soil, and some wooden stakes if you prefer to grow the taller types to keep them standing tall and proud.

Many colorful varieties are available as seeds from seed catalogs and online nurseries. Your local garden center will have a few transplantable-sized plants, usually in mixed colors. The hybrid types will be loaded with blossoms and bloom continuously (with regular clipping of spent flower spikes) from summer through fall.

Arctotis — Blue-Eyed Daisy

Arctotis grandis



Many plants have daisy-like names. This one earns the title for its attractive steel-blue center cone, surrounded by a light-yellow ring. The petals are off-white; some gardeners call it pearl-white, for they have a slight iridescence, thus, the less-common nickname of African Pearl Daisy. I adore this plant!

This species is native to South Africa and is a tender perennial, but for many gardeners it is treated as an annual. It loves as much sunlight as possible and well-drained, fertile soil. It also thrives in hot, semi-dry areas if you have such a challenging location.

You will be very disappointed if you plant this for evening garden enjoyment. Unlike most other daisies, this species closes its flowers for the night and reopens them at dawn. It must feel the evening chill and wrap itself up for the night.

Although it produces many flowers over the summer, it can become untidy and spindly unless you clip back the spent blossoms. Doing so encourages it to produce more flowers and develop a more attractive plant. Speaking of which, try growing many plants—one or two do not make an impressive display. They are easy to germinate and grow from seed, but try to sow them early indoors in the spring. You will have larger plants to set out after all frost has ended.

Garden centers and nurseries do not grow this plant, but online seed businesses may have it available. These flowers are well worth finding and growing!

Begonia

Begonia tuberosa hybrida; semperflorens



Mother Nature appears to have a few favorite flowers. She has outdone herself in creating many types of plants, but Begonias are a prime example of her endearment, for she has over 1,300 species. Most of these species are tropical or semi-tropical but grow well in partly shaded flower beds or containers.

Most begonias have thick, fleshy stems – an adaptation to store water when the soil becomes too dry. They grow best in well-drained soil that periodically dries. If exposed to wet soil, the stems and tubers will rot, killing the plant. Some begonias develop tubers or thickened rhizomes (stems) that serve as energy-storage structures to survive dry seasons in the tropics, but they die when exposed to freezing conditions.

Regardless of type, size, or shape, their popularity stems from their showy, colorful leaves and flowers. Flowers can range from simple, single-petaled blossoms to flamboyant, billowy, large-petaled ones. Their leaves can be dark green to bronze with random contrasting patterns.

Let's concentrate on two types of Begonias we can plant in partly sunny to shady locations. Yes, they can tolerate full sunlight, but depending on the variety or species, this may cause flower discoloration and excessive leaf dryness. Dappled sunlight or partial shade, and well-drained, fertile soil provide excellent growing conditions for these plants in bedding or in any container.

Let's start with **Tuberous Begonias** (*Begonia tuberosa hybrida*), which are popular annuals usually grown for displays in hanging baskets and containers. They are tender plants treated as annuals, even though you can save the tough, fibrous, concave-shaped tubers over the winter. That's the theory, but the tubers may dry and die by spring. I recommend purchasing new plants each spring at any nursery or garden center.

Tuberous Begonias produce those colorful and flamboyant "fluffy" flowers that resemble roses. These are the male blossoms, while the female flowers have fewer petals.

These plants are sensitive to wet soil, as their tubers and stems can rot if not grown in well-drained, porous soil. They tolerate full sunlight but are susceptible to heat damage, which can damage blossoms and leaves.

Deep shade limits blooming and can make stems and leaves too floppy and succulent, creating prime conditions for fungal and other diseases. So, the best "Goldilocks condition" is to grow these plants in partly sunny or dappled-shady areas and in well-drained soil.

All garden centers offer these Begonias each spring. A tried-and-true variety to purchase is the "**NonStop**" colorful selections, for they can bloom non-stop all summer and into the fall if — seriously, IF — you take the time to care for them adequately.



The most commonly grown Begonias offered to gardeners are the ordinary, low-growing annual **Wax or Bedding Begonias** (*Begonia semperflorens-cultorum*)—as shown above. Their flower colors include red, rose, pink, and white. The “waxy” or shiny leaves are grass-green to reddish-bronze.

Among begonias, these are more tolerant of full sun, but they are also beautiful in partly shaded areas. If you ever become tired and disillusioned over constantly planting Impatiens in shaded areas, these are a great substitute. However, unlike Impatiens, these plants do not tolerate consistently moist soil. Hooray—you can save money on that monthly water bill! Well-drained but fertile soil that dries periodically is to their liking. Otherwise, constant wet soil will rot the roots and stems.

I have seen spectacular bedding displays of these plants growing in partly shady slopes or banks. They had excellent drainage here, and the

abundant pink and white blossoms brightened the areas beneath several large trees throughout the summer and into the fall.

Even though they are excellent bedding plants, we should always appreciate the practicality of growing them in containers to highlight those dull areas on a patio or deck.

We can raise all Begonias from seed, which can prove challenging even to the best “green thumb” gardeners. I gave up doing so eons ago and purchased plants from nurseries. The reason for this difficulty is that their seeds are nearly dust-like. Naturally, you can raise blooming plants by sowing them, but it requires specific conditions and considerable time. Fortunately, many nurseries and garden centers offer a wide selection of inexpensive plants.

Browallia

Browallia speciosa or *Browallia americana*



Although classified as a tropical plant, Browallia is an annual in most gardens. Johan Browallius (1707-1755), a Swedish botanist, bishop, and physician, discovered it growing in South America. I guess he couldn't decide which occupation to pursue.

This fantastic annual belongs to the same family as tobacco and petunias. It has the familiar names of Sapphire Flower, Bush Violet, or Amethyst Flower; the star-shaped petals are vivid blue, purple, and white. Easy to grow from seeds sown in early spring, they will bloom by midsummer in beds and containers. They can also be kept as an indoor potted plant over the winter when placed in a well-lit, warm area.

Browallia grows well in well-drained, fertile soil in full sun to partial shade. It can grow up to 2 feet tall and wide in garden beds and bloom throughout the summer. When grown in containers, clip them back periodically to prevent them from becoming too tall.

Three excellent modern varieties, **Endless Illumination**, **Blue Bells**, and **Marine Bells**, sport large, indigo- to purple-blossomed flowers with small white centers. These named-variety plants are available in larger garden centers, and species seeds are available in rare seed catalogs. The flowers of the species are much smaller than the cultivated varieties grown today, but produce many blossoms.

Calendula — Pot Marigold

Calendula officinalis



The common name "marigold" is confusing, as gardeners also call another unrelated flower a "marigold" (technically *Tagetes*), which we will review later.

Calendula comes in a wide variety, with flower colors ranging from bright yellows and vibrant oranges to mixed shades.

They make excellent cut flowers for the house, thanks to their long stems. With standard cut-flower care and maintenance, they should last for a week or more for enjoyment.

Their brightly colored petals are edible (caution: may cause allergic reactions in some people) and add vivid color to salads, rice dishes,

soups, and stews. This culinary use explains the common nickname 'Pot Marigold'. Craft folks also use them as dyes for fabrics and as ingredients in skin lotions.

The flowers bloom in midsummer until a killing frost. They will self-seed, and new blossoms will grow and flourish next year. The plants are low-maintenance, but occasional clipping of old flowers helps prevent excessive seed production. This will prompt more flowers to bloom during the entire summer. They require ample sunlight and well-drained soil to thrive.

You can easily find unique colors and varieties in almost all seed catalogs and garden centers.

Calibrachoa

Calibrachoa species hybrids



This plant is the new annual kid on the block, or rather, in a garden. The resemblance is often mistaken for mini-petunias, but they belong to a different family.

They are among the new bedding plants offered by larger garden centers, but are still uncommon in some locations. These plants are native to the open grasslands of Brazil, Chile, Peru, and Argentina, along with wild petunias. They even grow alongside them, which led botanists to think they were small-flowered petunias. Discovered at the same time as petunias (early to mid-19th century), they gained notoriety in the 1990s. This begs the question of why it took so long to acknowledge their existence.

An apparent reason is that *Calibrachoa* has numerous small blossoms, earning it the nickname “Million Bells.” For most of the history of flower gardening, larger flowers (in this case, petunias) received more attention and were given more space to grow. Plants with small flowers (even those with thousands of them) consistently limit their popularity. I can imagine what Dr. Sigmund Freud would have said about this botanical-physiological hybrid observation.

Unlike most upright petunias, these plants are sprawlers — some people describe them as “spillers” – for they can cascade over containers, hanging baskets, or carpet the flower bed as a groundcover. These plants can have bright, splashy, contrasting colors. Some varieties have double petals and resemble tiny roses. Additionally, unlike pampered petunias, these plants tolerate drier growing conditions.

One undesirable trait of *Calibrachoa* (specifically its hybrids) is that they produce few seeds, limiting their production for garden centers. This lack of seeds limits their availability to consumers. However, the opposite desirable trait is that this few-seed production results in numerous blossoms throughout the summer and into the fall, making it a great candidate for inclusion in any flower garden bed or border.

Centaurea — Bachelor Buttons or Cornflower

Centaurea cyanus



Gardeners have long considered this annual cottage garden plant a favorite for its vivid flowers. Each plant will produce extensive summer displays, resulting in long-lasting cut flowers for the house. However, it has not been ideal for farmers, as it grew like a weed in grain crops—wheat, oats, barley, and, as its name implies, corn. It is not much of a threat today, for there are far more invasive weeds to worry over.

It eventually became a cherished garden flower because it is easy to grow in any garden. The seeds are also easy to sow — just scatter and

lightly cover with soil. The plants will thrive in well-drained, fertile soil and in as much sunlight as possible.

Cornflowers make beautiful cut flowers and can last a long time (possibly over a week) in a vase of water. They can have single to double petals, and the colors range from intense blue to purple, pink, red, and brilliant white.

This flower reminds me of the classic Hans Christian Andersen tale of the ugly duckling becoming a beautiful swan. No one liked this flower, but over time, people accepted it, possibly because it produced many flowers over the summer.

It was once a men's fashion accessory, used to insert a flower or small bouquet into the buttonholes of men's jackets or coats. It became known as Bachelor's Buttons. That was a fashion statement from years ago and is now considered antiquated by today's standards.

The flowers are terrific for picking, especially since that fantastic blue color is so damn attractive. Hey, you can't have enough blue flowers in any garden!

Seeds of this annual are in almost all seed catalogs and garden centers. Some nurseries will even offer potted plants, but you get more bang for your buck by sowing lots of seeds in your garden.

Coleus

Coleus blumei



Native to Southeast Asia, Coleus has long been popular as a colorful annual foliage plant for gardens, containers, and houseplants. Newer varieties are pleasantly gaudy with eye-popping, beautiful colors. You can't resist growing a few when you see them in nurseries and garden centers. In my eyes, they resemble gorgeous stained-glass windows with vivid colors and unusual geometric patterns.

These newer varieties also develop fewer flowers. Yes, fewer flower formations! Imagine getting excited over this when, at any other time, you want as many flowers as possible. Here, the tiny blue blossoms on several thin stems can distract from the overall look of the plants when they are growing in the garden, especially in any container.

Although they can tolerate more sunlight than older varieties, these plants still grow and look best in partly shady areas. One word of caution when purchasing plants is to make sure which ones can grow in full sun. For most Coleus plants, full sunlight will damage the leaves, causing brown splotches and faded colors.

Coleus plants range in size from petite to extra-large — both in height and leaf size — but they have the potential to look horrible. I recommend choosing one bold color (or two complementary color patterns) for beds or containers. My rule is to match items – don't mix! Don't overmix multicolored varieties, as their combined appearance can look ghastly.

Now, what is out there for you to find and grow? Look for newer **ColorBlaze** and **Kong** varieties, which many nurseries and larger garden centers sell. Again, please read the labels to determine their sun exposure and potential height.

Many growers raise Coleus plants from seed, resulting in a wide range of leaf colors. Each plant will look different. The most beautiful and expensive plants are cut-grown to keep their color complexities and leaf shapes. If you can afford it, purchase several for planting in containers, but not for flower beds. You can get up close and personal to enjoy those spectacular colors when grown in containers. They are worth growing!

Convolvulus — Bush Morning Glory; Dwarf Morning Glory

Convolvulus tricolor “Royal Ensign”



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I am prone to “Shiny Object Syndrome.” When viewing any flower garden, I also exhibit a similar condition called “Blue Flower Syndrome.” Any shiny, glittery object or vivid blue flower, I will instantly gravitate to and become mesmerized.

One such type of annual I have become enamored by is this magnificent relative of the Morning Glory. Each three-inch-diameter trumpet-shaped flower features cobalt-blue petals surrounding a starburst of

brilliant white, with a buttercup-yellow center. This is my kind of “bling” to accessorize any flower garden bed, border, or container.

You may think this is a recent floral introduction to gardeners, but it is not. This plant was also being gazed at and hypnotized by those colors back in the 1700s. But here lies a problem: why isn't this plant more planted or acknowledged by the gardening public?

You can find seeds in any catalog, online, or at a garden center. Strangely, none are offered as starter plants in nurseries or seen displayed in any garden. One explanation I can think of is that it's referenced as a Morning Glory. Technically, it is not a true glory but a relation.

Another explanation is that it forms a slight vining habit, but most of the growth is mounded. This plant grows to an average of 1 foot tall and twice as wide. Unlike a morning glory, it blooms all day and non-stop until a killing fall frost. What's not to like about those qualities?

Start sowing seeds indoors for transplanting outdoors after the threat of frost has passed. The plants prefer warm soil, so don't worry about waiting a couple of weeks longer for the ground to warm up. These plants prefer sunlight and the usual requirements for fertile, well-drained soil. Plant an entire bed of these flowers, and don't be surprised if I notice them from afar and visit you some sunny afternoon to admire their beauty.

Coreopsis — Tickseed

Coreopsis tinctoria



These attractive annual and perennial plants are ideal for any flower garden. The perennial varieties are easy to grow and become a no-fuss, problem-free attraction once established in your garden.

An old but still popular annual species is the *Coreopsis tinctoria*, or the **Plains Coreopsis**. Tall, growing to over three feet, it features numerous eye-catching bright yellow daisies with brownish-red centers. You will always find new plants sprouting each spring from their self-sown seeds.

As a vibrant-colored member of the daisy family, it is nicknamed tickseed because its seeds resemble blood-engorged ticks. Oh, that's

sick! The things people imagine are borderline disturbing.

Coreopsis will bloom all summer if planted in full sunlight and fertile, well-drained soil. They dislike clay-based soils and prefer a medium with more sand or gravel.

Most annual and perennial varieties produce long, slender, sturdy stems — ideal for adding to mixed flower bouquets. Your bonus for growing these plants is usually more than one flower per stem. Hey, the more the merrier!

To ensure all summer blooming, always deadhead spent flowers to prevent excessive seed formation, which can “shut down” further flower production for the season.

You should be able to find seeds in most garden centers or online nurseries. However, I have not seen potted plants in nurseries.

Cosmidium

Cosmidium burridgeanum



This is a relatively new annual with little information available for most gardeners. How about you get acquainted with this dynamo of a grower and a powerhouse of a bloomer?

The plant is a native Texas wildflower with no common name (yet), so we will use the Latin name. It is another member of the impressive daisy family, with wiry stems and stunning displays of yellow-tipped, purple-red-brown, centered Cosmos-like blossoms.

Cosmidium has an unprecedentedly intense chocolate or cocoa aroma. You can smell the intense chocolate fragrance from all the many — and I do mean A LOT of — flowers. It is easy to grow from seeds sprinkled

on flower beds and should appeal to children and adult chocoholics alike. It is ideal for spreading in beds, rock gardens, and containers.

The plant produces so many flowers in summer that it will exhaust itself, especially as it forms new seeds. For a little proactive maintenance, clip spent flowers back during the summer to encourage more blooming until a fall frost.

Individual plants can grow to about two feet tall and wide. Planting a large clump or group is more attractive and provides a stronger chocolatey perfume throughout the garden.

Look for the variety called **Philippine** in published or online seed catalogs. It is shorter and bushier than the typical species. You will not find this plant in garden centers, either as potted plants or in seed racks. However, you can find seeds in some internet seed businesses, so make sure to “search away” on your favorite browser to discover them.

Cosmos

Cosmos bipinnatus



Oh my goodness, I must caution you, for there must be a zillion hybrid varieties in this colorful group of annuals. Their descriptions will overwhelm you if you read the seed catalogs (either in print or online) and if you try to decide which ones to grow in your gardens. I'm not sure where to begin, but I can give you a general idea of what to expect.

As another relative of the immense daisy family, botanists say Cosmos is "ridiculously easy" to grow in any garden. If they were currency, your investment in purchasing seed (very cheap) would reward you with a windfall of stunning, ever-blooming flowers. You will be rich in colorful splendor.

The blossoms usually have long stems—ideal for cutting and picking—held high above the attractive fern-like or feather-like foliage. Most plants can grow to over three feet tall, but shorter varieties are available. All plants become bushy over the summer and quickly fill in an area.

To earn bonus points for being ideal annuals for a no-to-low-care garden, these plants can tolerate general neglect, such as reduced watering and growing in less fertile soil. If you pamper them with kindness — watch out — they will bloom themselves silly. As long as they grow in mostly sunny areas, they will bloom all summer and into the fall.

You can expect a wide range of colors (except blue), from pure yellow to white, pink, red, and orange, as well as many bicolors with contrasting or alternating striped petals.

There are two species of *Cosmos* (with several varieties) you can include in your garden. *Cosmos sulphureus* is native to North America, and, as the Latin name suggests, it has deep to bright golden-yellow, double to semi-double blossoms. It can grow to over six feet tall, but cultivated varieties lower this height to a welcome two feet. As a native prairie plant, it is unsurpassed in being adapted to drought and poor soil conditions.

The other common species for your garden, *Cosmos bipinnatus* (shown above), has a more magnificent display of floral colors, as mentioned earlier. The hybrid varieties in this species grow to a modest 2 to 4 feet tall but branch out to quickly fill an area. Most types display single petals, but semi to fully double varieties are now being bred.

Be sure to grow these plants in your gardens to attract butterflies, bees, and hummingbirds (if you live in North America) in your neighborhood. Sit back in your most comfortable lawn chair and enjoy all those colorful wings and petals.

Your local garden center will have seed packets available for purchase. For more colorful varieties, purchase from online seed nurseries.

Craspedia — Drumstick Flower; Billy Balls

Craspedia globosa



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When you think of Australia and New Zealand, you immediately visualize their marsupial animals, such as kangaroos, koala bears, and the Tasmanian Devil. Hey, let's also include the egg-laying mammal, the duck-billed platypus. But how many times do you think of their wild-looking wildflowers? Probably never. That is a shame because these regions have fascinating native flowers.

Presented here is one such delightful botanical oddity. No, I shouldn't label it that way. Let's call it a pleasant curiosity.

Craspedia is a down-under member of the immense daisy family (no, this is not a marsupial daisy!), appearing as yellow ping-pong balls stuck on stems. This impressionistic view is not an exaggeration.

The perfectly spherical flower heads are suspended on stiff, wiry stems above clumps of grass-like silvery-green leaves. These flower heads, extending upward to almost two feet, have no ray florets (like the large petal-like flowers of a daisy) but only the fertile florets congested within the head. Most heads are an inch or more in diameter, but a clump of these flowers waving in the breeze all summer is mesmerizing. Florists highly value them as cut flowers for contrasting (and conversation-making) displays.

These plants are easy to grow from seed and, once established in the garden, are practically carefree. They thrive in full sun and well-drained, fertile soil. Although hardy in the Australian regions, they are annuals if you live below zone 8.

You will have better luck finding seeds (and possibly plants) at online nurseries than at your local garden center.

Cuphea — Bat Face Cuphea; Tiny Mice

Cuphea llavea



If there is one plant I will grow each year, it will be this gorgeous species. My first attraction was its vivid red and purple colors. The second attraction is the name; the flowers really do look like a bat's face and ears. I think I can see some fangs jutting from the mouth.

Another "cute" name is Tiny Mice. They apparently resemble small mice, especially with the "large ears," but my eyes cannot distinguish this appearance. No matter what color these blossoms are, you will enjoy their constant blooming from late spring to fall frost.



Native to Mexico (zone 9 and above), it can grow to over three feet tall and wide (oh what a sight that would be), but it can only muster as a low-growing annual shrub for your garden.

Blooming abundantly over the summer, it can become an excellent addition for bedding and edging a border. These inch-long tubular blossoms draw in all the neighborhood hummingbirds and butterflies. Planting them in containers, especially hanging baskets, increases eye-level appeal.

No matter where you plant them, make sure they are basking in plenty of sunlight and in well-drained, fertile soil. These plants dislike shade and will not bloom.

You can purchase potted plants from many larger garden centers. You can grow these plants from seed (if you can locate some), but they will take longer to grow and bloom.

Dahlia

Dahlia hybrida



From midsummer until the killing frosts of fall, you can depend on this tuberous perennial to provide plenty of colorful flower heads to brighten your garden and inside your house as cut flowers.

Since the hybridization of the original species found in Mexico and Central and South America, a wide diversity of shapes, sizes, and colors of these plants has graced our gardens. There are numerous single to double-petaled varieties, each with different flower diameters, plant growth, and stem strength.

Based on my research, I haven't identified which varieties stand out as excellent long-blooming candidates. The double-petaled (or sometimes

ball-shaped) types may be longer-lasting.

Don't bother growing Dahlias from seed because they are a jangled genetic mess of irregularities. Instead, raise them from tubers purchased from garden centers or specialty nurseries for the best color and flower head size. You will need to grow the larger plants — some types, up to four feet tall — with dinner-plate-sized flowers held up by strong, long stems.

Echinacea — Coneflower

Echinacea purpurea hybrids



The colorful varieties offered today are nothing like the ones grown in your grandmother's garden. Years ago, it was an underappreciated ornamental wildflower, but that has all changed. Hybridizers or plant breeders recognized its exciting possibilities and made an excellent plant even better.

Several new varieties are available for your garden, featuring new flower colors and fragrances not found in older species-based plants. Be prepared to experience a whole new way to enjoy and grow these bone-hardy, practically everblooming, and dependable perennials.

Coneflowers thrive in the hot sun, dry soil, and, for a short period, wet ground. Their large flowers bloom in late June and continue all summer. They will look rather untidy, so clip off spent flowers. They can grow to over two feet tall and are hardy from zones 3 to 10. Other qualities are being “butterfly magnets” (attracting butterflies far and wide) and making excellent cut flowers for bouquets.

Echinacea derives its name from the Greek “echinos,” meaning “hedgehog,” referring to its spiky central cone. Be careful when smelling the sweet fragrance, for those bristles are prickly to the nose. Ouch!! Although the colorful petals steal the floral show, these bristly cones have a lovely iridescence in the sunlight.

Okay, these flowers are gorgeous and fragrant – what do I recommend for you to grow in your garden? Get whatever colorful variety you can find! There are many outstanding cultivars available, but it is challenging to narrow them down to just one or two. Many of these are available as plants by several mail-order nurseries and larger garden centers.

Try to avoid seed-grown strains, as they revert to the species characteristics and lack the outstanding color and blossom shapes of newer plants.

Fuchsia — Ladies Eardrops

Fuchsia magellanica 'Riccartonii'



Have you ever wished those colorful Fuchsia plants, with gorgeous blossoms cascading down from hanging baskets, were hardy? Yes, that would be spectacular. Well, sorry, keep on hoping, but there is at least one species that can survive cold temperatures. The **Riccartonii** variety, known as **The Hardy Fuchsia**, is native to Argentina and, more specifically, Chile. It is not cascading but a taller, upright growing type—acting as a semi-woody perennial.

This plant is cold-hardy and can winter over in zone 6 with adequate protection. Where frosts are infrequent during the winter, this shrub is deciduous (drops its leaves), but where below-freezing temperatures

regularly occur, the tops die back. Mulching helps protect the underground crown and the root system.

Plant this Fuchsia in very fertile, moist, well-drained soil, preferably in an eastern-facing location that receives full morning sunlight to partial afternoon shade. Avoid hot, dry, mostly sunny places. I live in a zone 5 growing area and heavily mulch the plants with a few inches of pea-sized gravel. This method provides excellent drainage and ventilation to the growth crown. Planting them near the east and south-side foundations of my house also helps them survive a brutal winter.

Under ideal growing conditions, this plant can reach over 10 feet tall and wide. My plants never seem to accomplish this feat, usually growing to a relatively modest three feet tall and wide. Regardless, they bloom abundantly throughout the summer with gorgeous purple and neon pink blossoms that attract hummingbirds.

I do not know why, but most garden centers do not sell this plant. Selling the hanging basket Fuchsias is obviously more profitable. Try an Internet search to locate mail-order plants. Raising this Fuchsia in your garden is worth all the trouble of hunting for it.

Gazania — African Daisy; Treasure Flower

Gazania rigens



If you haven't grown this plant yet, you should. This is a fantastic annual or tender perennial, native to the southern coastal regions of Africa. Related to the vast Aster family (well, the daisy family, like so many others listed earlier and later, but I wanted to include asters to add a surprise for you) with large daisy-like “clustered flowers,” it’s an all-purpose plant for bedding and edging in borders. It also doesn’t mind being sequestered in any container or planter. Their leaves are usually deep green but may have a silvery underside, giving them a partial sheen in bright sunlight.

Those four-inch-diameter flowers radiate bold colors of bright yellow and orange, usually with a contrasting central band of molten lava red. The effect is startling once seen, and you will see plenty of these flowers from late spring till fall.

There is, however, one unfortunate caveat with its blooming that tends to disappoint new gardeners. By evening, and especially on cloudy days, the flowers close and remain closed until exposed to bright sunlight. These plants are true sun worshipers, thriving in hot areas and don't mind semi-drought conditions. For container plantings, ensure excellent drainage in the potting soil to prevent prolonged wetting. Allow the soil to dry between waterings if no rain is forecasted.

Gazanias are not low-maintenance; you will need to remove spent flower stalks (commonly called deadheading) to prevent excessive seed formation. Not doing so makes the display look messy and can prevent extended blooming. Once a week, trimming your plants will keep them blooming for additional weeks.

You can grow different varieties from spring-sown seeds (indoors for colder locations) and later transplant them to containers or in the garden after the threat of frost or when the weather is reliably warm. Appreciating hot places, these plants waste little time growing and flowering, so don't fret if you delay transplanting for a few weeks in late spring.

You can purchase young plants in small pots or cell packs from nurseries or garden centers, but they usually offer a mix of colors. That's fine, but you may end up with something that is not incredibly colorful. Try to purchase plants of the same color (as depicted on the label, if available). For a recommendation on what to grow, try finding (either seeds or young plants) of the **Daybreak Series**, including '**Daybreak Red Stripe**' or '**Daybreak Tiger Stripes Mix**,' which have reliable complementary colors. These types are stunning!

Gomphrena — Globe Amaranth

Gomphrena globosa



Some garden plants will never gain notoriety, even if they are easy to grow and produce colorful flowers. This unfortunate annual has all the qualifications of grandeur but is eclipsed by our common bedding plants. It may need to hire a better publicity agent.

The strange part of this apparent lack of interest is that it has historically been a welcome inhabitant in flower gardens worldwide for several years. Although gardeners enjoy it, no one seems as enthusiastic about its colorful, easy-to-grow merits as those of geraniums, petunias, and impatiens.

There appears to be a revival of interest in these plants, as breeders and growers are reshaping genes to make them more visually appealing to gardeners.

The flowers have a passing resemblance to clover flower heads. They have a limited color range—from pinkish-red, purple, and white. One standout new variety is **Strawberry Fields**, featuring bright red flowers. Other prime growers for your garden include **Lavender Lady**, shown above, with vibrant purple petals, and **Fireworks**, with fluorescent pinkish-rose blossoms.

Globe Amaranth is an easy-to-grow annual that thrives in sunny, hot, and dry conditions. It is native to the southwestern United States and Mexico. Once it blooms, it continues until a fall frost.

Helenium — Sneezeweed

Helenium autumnale



Here is a gorgeous perennial that can cause sneezing, but only if you dry the flower heads and grind them into a fine powder. The western Native Americans and the westward-ho pioneers followed this process. The common name they gave was “snuff.”

For those of you who are not into stuffing narcotics into your nostrils, it is nothing like powdered cocaine. Historically, snuff was powdered tobacco, but a less-addictive generic plant was substituted when you can't have the real McCoy. Thus, this beautiful flowering plant was used. Your immediate impatient question is, “*What in blazes do these daisies have to do with all this snuff business?*” The answer is — nothing at all. I thought a little historical nonsense was in order.

Moving on to the primary content of this ebook, the original Sneezeweed flowers are bright yellow, single-petaled “daisies.” Over the years, plant breeders (not under the influence of creating better snuff) saw great potential in developing several colorful varieties for use in home gardens — for eye appeal only.

Helenium grows quickly from seed sown in spring and will develop into two to five-foot-tall, bushy, heavily blooming plants by fall. Throughout this time, depending on the variety, you will encounter masses of brightly colored single to double “daisies,” attracting plenty of bees and butterflies of all sizes, colors, and species.

Make sure to grow your plants in plenty of sunshine and well-drained, fertile soil. They make excellent companion plants for many other garden flowers, especially those related to the Composite family.

Nurseries offer several varieties as potted plants or seeds. One outstandingly colorful variety is ‘**Mardi Gras**’, shown above, with young flower heads that start yellow, age to orange, and then red. The central cone is dark brown (or black) with vibrant yellow stamens. No wonder the bees and butterflies go crazy over visiting these flowers! It, and most other colorful varieties, are hardy in zones 4-8.

Heliotrope

Heliotropium peruvianum



This plant became honored as “The Annual of the Year” ... in 1898. I think it is long overdue for more tributes. What better way to restart these accolades than to plant this fantastic annual in your garden or several containers?

Native to Peru, it became trendy in the late 19th century for its color and strong vanilla or almond fragrance. British reference books called it the “Cherry Pie Plant” for its floral color, supposedly resembling the effect of pouring milk on a wild black cherry pie slice. Mixing the blackish-red fruit with the milk forms a dark blue or purple slurry. It ruins a delicious cherry pie, but produces attractive purple shades.

Heliotrope also makes excellent bedding and container subjects, so remember to pot up a few for the patio. It thrives in full sunlight and well-drained, fertile soil. By all means, protect this plant from frost, for it is susceptible to cold.

The best purple variety to grow is **Fragrant Delight**, with dark blue to light blue flower clusters and a superb fragrance. **White Heliotrope** has powder-blue flowers when young, which turn pure white as it ages.

Seed packets are available in larger seed catalogs or online, but purchase named varieties for faster development and longer enjoyment from spring through fall.

Hemerocallis — Daylily

Hemerocallis species hybrids



Hemerocallis, in Greek translation, means “day beauty” for each flower lasts only one day. Still, the plant’s overall bloom time can last about a month. If you want all summer blooming, well, that can be a problem. Like most perennials, this plant has a gorgeous burst of bloom in early summer, lasting about a month. But fear not, as new breeding work is unveiling varieties that produce sporadic extra-blooming clusters that extend throughout the summer and into early fall.

The first, and still relatively popular (some gardening critics say overused) type, **Stella De Oro**, shown above, with its deep yellow color, has contributed its genetic material to the development of other colors. **Purple d’Oro** is (obviously) purple-tinted with a yellow throat. **Red**

Hot Returns flaunts a vibrant cherry-red on (reported) continuous bloom until fall. **Pardon Me** goes even further, blooming until a killing frost, with a burgundy-red display. Others are currently available in nurseries, especially those specializing in daylily breeding and cultivation.

Most plants exceed 3 feet tall (including the flower stalks), while some strains are shorter. All thrive best in full to part sunlight. They are hardy from zones 3 to 10. If you want to include the best candidate for a low-maintenance garden, this perennial is ideal. Plant them in well-drained, fertile soil, either from containers or as bare-root clumps. It will take them a full growing season to develop, but each succeeding year will display their grandeur — all without your help.

Hibiscus

Hibiscus moscheutos



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Every flowering plant family has a few exotic members that stand out for their size, color, and blooms. This group of plants is no exception. Being part of the extensive Mallow family, they are tall-growing perennials or woody, tropical shrubs.

Some varieties have the largest flowers (in diameter) of any other garden perennial.

For our purposes, we will focus on hardy perennials. Do not confuse the colorful tropical and semi-tropical hibiscus shrubs (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*) offered in many garden centers with the following varieties.

Those tropical plants are sensitive to cold and should be stored indoors over the winter.

As with all Hibiscus species, their flowers typically last only one or two days (like Daylilies). You may not notice this, for there are many blooms each day. The petals unfurl fully during the day, but by evening, they fold and later drop off.

All varieties prefer full sunlight and fertile, well-drained soil. With all those flowers and foliage, please water these plants during extended dry spells.

I recommend *Hibiscus moscheutos* '**Lord Baltimore**' (shown above) as one towering variety to grow in your garden. If you have the garden space and need something to show off to your friends, this variety is a must-grow-now plant.

Created by the hybridization of several related species in 1955, this hardy (zones 4 to 9) perennial remains one of the best cultivars to grow in any garden. It reaches 8 feet tall (possibly more) and 4 feet wide on well-established plants. For smaller, growing plants, I suggest placing them in large containers.

The bright, crimson-red, dinner-plate-sized (up to 12 inches in diameter) flowers will cover this 'herbaceous shrub' practically all summer. Estimates of 300 large flowers may appear on a well-grown plant throughout a typical summer. Someone sure had plenty of spare time to count them!

With all these flowers, you may think there will be plenty of seeds produced by fall. In some varieties, yes, but for this outstanding plant, the flowers are sterile and have no seeds.

Since you are enthusiastic (as I am) to get this plant, where do we purchase it? Your local garden center may have it available, but offered only as potted plants (since it produces no seeds). If not, several well-known mail-order companies always have a supply on hand.



Another incredible variety is *Hibiscus moscheutos* '**Heartthrob**' (shown above). Introduced in 2012, this zone 4-9 perennial has the darkest flowers available for a Hibiscus (as of this writing). The 10-inch-diameter flowers are reddish-black, with the unopened, glossy buds almost black.

If you are an amateur *NCIS* investigator, the color resembles the grizzly shade of dried or old blood. Can there be a true-black flower? Most botanists feel it may be an elusive color. For this Hibiscus, the flower color is a deep garnet red when backlit by the sun, but near black in partial shade or on cloudy days.

Unlike most other varieties, this plant is more compact, growing to five feet tall and almost as wide. If grown in full to partial sunlight and in fertile, moist (but well-drained) soil, the plant will bloom for most of the summer. I made a mistake (yes, I make the occasional major goof-

up) by planting this Hibiscus in a hot, dry location. But it has suffered no ill effects.

Growers offer this variety only as potted plants or dormant roots by larger garden centers and mail-order nurseries.

Hydrangea

Hydrangea macrophylla “Endless Summer”



Growers label these plants, also known as Big-Leaf or French Hydrangea, as being perennials or semi-woody shrubs. They begin as herbaceous perennials but later transform into woody, hollow stems by fall. They are hardy to zones 5-9, but lower zones are problematic. Severe cold conditions will kill the new growth buds on the older stems.

It may surprise you that these plants can thrive in partly shady areas. Yes, you can raise them in full sunlight for most or all of the day, but a major prerequisite is that they grow in consistently moist soil. This requirement is especially crucial for gardeners in hot climates.

The reason for providing moist soil is that these plants have large leaves and extensive growth. When grown in partially to fully shaded locations, the plants can tolerate periodic dry soil without issues.

Most Hydrangeas are low-maintenance, but you also must be careful when pruning them. Cut them back at the wrong time of the year, and it will delay flowering for two years. My advice is to leave them alone. New varieties now on the market show great promise of easing fears about “messing things up” when pruning. They bloom on current growth and provide longer enjoyment from spring to fall.

Today’s newer varieties bloom all summer with either large blue or pink flower-heads, depending on the pH of your garden soil. Look for the variety called **Endless Summer**. This aptly named type has an outstanding display all summer.

There are other varieties with similar names, but they all have this repeat-blooming capability. Most can grow to over three feet tall and wide, with sturdy stems to support the massive blooms. You will find many of these new varieties in larger garden centers or nurseries.

Hydrangeas always remind me of my old high school and college chemistry classes. It involves determining whether an unknown solution's pH is acidic or basic based on its color. Hydrangea “flowers” exhibit a similar phenomenon, changing color depending on soil pH. What we think of as flowers are actually bracts or modified leaves. The actual flower structures are small and located in the center of these bracts.

To make these bracts blue, acidify the soil by adding aluminum sulfate. To turn them pink, add lime (calcium carbonate) to the ground. The more of these soil additives we add, the deeper the bracts' color.

What happens to hydrangeas with white bracts? Here, you do not need to add chemicals, as the plants will remain white regardless of soil pH.

I advise caution when adding these chemicals to the soil. They can damage or “sicken” surrounding plants due to the significant change in soil pH.

Impatiens — Touch-Me-Not or Busy Lizzie

Impatiens walleriana and *Impatiens hawkeri*



Hostas may be the go-to perennial for planting in shady areas in a garden, but the honor of bedding annuals goes to the Impatiens. They are grown everywhere in practically every garden. They are also among the most popular flowering plants at garden centers and nurseries. All hail *Impatiens walleriana*!

Okay. Hold on now—time for a tough-love intervention with all my fellow gardeners. Please don't judge me for what I am about to share with you. Impatiens are, for me, sorry to say, BORING. There, I admit it. Each year, breeders create new varieties with glitzy names, but they

lack any profound color differences. How many shades of pink or orange do we need each year from plant breeders? Plus, Impatiens serves only as a subject of “flower bed gazing.” They cannot multitask, for example, by providing cut flowers or attracting pollinators such as bees and butterflies. This would be heresy-talk in many gardening circles! I'd better run to the hills for safety's sake.

Another reason for disliking them is that they are not among the easiest flowers to grow from seed. It can be challenging to provide optimal germination conditions, and a packet of seeds is very expensive. We need to purchase flats of these plants each year.

Impatiens need to grow in shady areas — especially the white and pale lavender varieties. Those colors do look great when grown in large, shady beds or as sporadic individual “points of light” alongside other shade-loving plants.

These annuals are your basic ‘plant-and-forget’ bedding plants. You don't have to do much with them, such as clipping off spent blossoms, for they are always in bloom from late spring until a fall frost. Unfortunately, you can't totally forget about them when they wilt in dry soil and later when you see your summer months water bills.



Another group of Impatiens is the **New Guinea Impatiens** (*Impatiens hawkeri*), providing beautiful color for flower beds and containers. To add truly festive decorative plants to your deck or patio, these plants will surely please you more than the boring, regular Impatiens. These varieties have better disease resistance and tolerate more sunshine. They can also offer more vivid colors—not only in the flowers but also in some with eye-catching variegated leaves. These varieties look fabulous when grown in partly sunny areas.

Ipomoea — Morning-glory

Ipomoea species



The sheer number of varieties and species (over 500 worldwide) in the Ipomoea family is apparently a favorite of Mother Nature.

Most species exhibit a similar tubular or funnel-shaped floral structure, with variations in color and size. Several varieties have developed over the years, with colors confined to blue-purple, pastel reddish-pink, and white. Most flowers feature a white center and a star-shaped pattern of whitish or darker shades on the petals.

One common feature is that they are all tropical plants. Yes, there is not one hardy floral soul in the entire group. As long as they experience a warm, moist spot to set down roots, they are happy to grow as annuals.

From mid-summer through a killing fall frost, they produce many flowers daily but bloom only in the morning before the sun becomes too intense. If it is a cloudy day, the show may extend until noon. Why do they do this? Why not bloom all day? No one knows why, but it may apply to early morning pollinating insects.

No matter which variety of Morning Glory strikes your fancy, they are all impressive and easy-to-grow vines for any gardener to grow. Their seeds are relatively large (easy enough to handle) but are very hard. They need to be soaked in water overnight to soften the seed coats and promote germination.

You can sow the seeds in small pots a few weeks before planting them outside after the last forecasted frost date. Never plant them in cold soil or during extended periods of cool weather. These plants thrive in summer heat and prefer warm growing conditions, both in the air and in the soil.

You can also sow the seeds outdoors in a sunny, well-drained area, including in large containers or hanging baskets. Don't worry about soil fertility; too much fertilizer will produce more leaves and stems than flowers. Since they are vines, if grown in a bed or container, they will need a support structure, such as a trellis, fence, or tall bamboo poles, for their climbing tendrils to wrap around.

Several varieties are available in seed catalogs, online nurseries, and garden centers. Make sure to grow the deep-purple-blue variety **President Tyler** (shown above), which blooms about one month earlier than most other varieties and continues to bloom prolifically until a killing frost.

Isotoma — Star Flower

Isotoma axillaris



If you want your patio or deck planter garden to be a star attraction with a galaxy of true-blue star-shaped flowers, you need to grow this stellar plant. This Australian native will be a supernova of beauty all summer.

OK. Enough of the hokey astronomy references. This plant is ideal for all container types, including hanging baskets, and for mass planting in beds and borders. It can grow well with other flowers by interweaving in any container. But, to get the most eye-catching delight from this plant, I recommend planting it alone.

It can develop as an ever-blooming mound over a foot high, extending twice as broad. It is reasonably easy to maintain, requiring plenty of sunlight and fertile, well-drained soil. The plants can tolerate occasional dry conditions but still benefit from a weekly refreshing drink of water. Don't keep the soil constantly wet; this will make the plant suffer and eventually die.

There appears to be a "perfect" variety that garden centers and landscapers highly recommend growing for outstanding blooming performance. I agree with them. That variety is **Beth's Blue®** (usually sold as **Beth's Blue® Star Flower**). It's a low-maintenance machine that tolerates hot locations and requires little deadheading (though it looks better with occasional trimming).

While you can grow the species from seed, it takes almost five months to flower. No, that's too long to wait. Your best recourse is to purchase Beth's Blue®. It is a special cultivar propagated vegetatively to preserve its unique qualities. You should be able to find it in many online nurseries and local garden centers, ready to grow and bloom abundantly with vivid blue blossoms.

Lantana

Lantana camara



I love this woody tropical shrub for its dazzling red, orange, pink, and bright yellow flower clusters. My only fault with it (no genuine fault of its own making) is its slow growth and limited blooming in a short summer. In warmer climates with a longer growing season, this shrub will produce taller branches and remain in continuous bloom.

Those living in warm climates should grow taller, bushier varieties that can reach over 4 feet tall. They will look great in flower beds, but plant some in larger containers for a patio or deck. Here, you can get more acquainted with the neighborhood butterflies and hummingbirds.

These low-maintenance plants thrive in hot weather, full sunlight, and fertile, well-drained soil. It can tolerate drier soil conditions for limited periods.

You can find potted plants at many garden centers in a variety of colors. You may find a source for seed, but why bother? Potted plants are ready to grow and attract all those butterflies, day-flying moths, and hummingbirds to your outdoor areas. Come one, come all to enjoy this plant's floral extravaganza!

Lavandula — Lavender

Lavandula angustifolia



Some garden plants, like the uniquely beautiful Lavender, thrive in areas that make us cringe with borderline panic. How in the world could they possibly live in such water-limited areas? Well, some naturally prefer such locations and not only survive but also thrive. This historically beloved herb loves hot, dry, gravelly areas. Better yet, it thrives in its ancestral digs in the Mediterranean regions, where harsh sunlight bakes well-drained, limestone-enriched soil.

Don't overfertilize or overwater these plants; fewer applications will yield healthier, hardier, happier plants in your garden. That meticulous, prissy care that other garden flowers adore may actually weaken your lavender plants and severely limit their hardiness.

Most varieties are hardy in zones 5 to 9, but excessively wet winter soil will spell doom. They hate perpetually damp soil, and ice is even worse. They need unapologetically abundant, well-drained soil to grow, bloom, and flourish. Forget about adding them to your beds and borders; rock gardens exposed to the blazing sun will suit them well. Give them a dose of tough love. They can take it – and appreciate it.

Two excellent varieties to grow are **Grosso** and **Provence** Lavender. These types are essential in the perfume fields of the Grosso and Provence Valleys of France. The other name of the Grosso variety is “**Fat Spike**.” It is not a street gang nickname but refers to the large, plump flower spikes. The blossoms of both varieties are azure-blue to violet, and the foliage is silvery-green.

You can find these variations and others in many garden centers and mail-order nurseries.

Leucanthemum — Shasta Daisy

Leucanthemum x superbum or *Chrysanthemum X superbum*



Let's face it — other than roses, this has to be the predominant, long-lasting flower of historical significance. With so many flowers blooming from spring through summer, there are plenty to pick! If a vase full of these flowers doesn't make you smile, what will?

The American horticulturist and plant breeder extraordinaire, Luther Burbank (1849 to 1926), had a brilliant idea. He wished to breed a new daisy, one that behaved itself and did not become weedy. He wanted one that was hardy, floriferous, and grew best in a garden instead of "in the wild." After 17 years of exhaustive breeding work, he created the

world-famous **Shasta Daisy**, named after Mount Shasta in California. Seventeen years of laborious breeding work to create a new flower — think of that!

Today, the large daisies sold in garden centers and those grown in our gardens are variations of his stunning plant. Being of wild heritage, this perennial is hardy and versatile across soil types and conditions. As long as they receive plenty of sunlight and grow in well-drained, fertile soil, these plants will thrive. They are hardy in zones 4 to 9.

You can grow these perennials from seed, but purchasing plants (such as Shasta and other newer varieties) can provide quicker, longer-lasting blooms.

Monarda — Bee Balm

Monarda didyma



Related to the mint family, this very hardy perennial (zones 3 to 9) features large, colorful flower heads. It is native to the eastern half of North America and is known by common names such as Bee Balm and Oswego Tea. These bold-looking perennial plants have robust minty-orange leaves. Their large blossom heads also act as magnets to attract all the hummingbirds and butterflies in your neighborhood. Not all, but a good number of them.

These plants thrive in full sunlight and partial shade. Although they produce abundant leaves, they are surprisingly well adapted to occasional drought. This will limit their blooming potential, but the plants can survive until the next beneficial rainfall. If you water them,

do so in the morning to allow the leaves to dry before evening. This act establishes a safety policy to prevent unsightly powdery mildew from becoming established.

There are many varieties, but **Jacob Cline**, shown above, is one of the largest and most famous of the bright red types. The large, striking red flowers bloom throughout the summer. This variety also has excellent resistance to mildew. This is an essential quality for Monardas (and other garden plants) that are susceptible to fungal diseases. You do not want to spend quality time stomping around with a sprayer filled with fungicide.

When shopping at garden centers, always look for disease-resistant varieties.

Nepeta — Catmint

Nepeta x faassenii



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Contrary to popular belief, Nepeta—specifically, *Nepeta x faassenii* or Catmint—is not a high-maintenance perennial flower. It’s one of the best investments for any garden, especially for new gardeners. The newer *Nepeta x faassenii* hybrids, with their wide variety of outstanding blooms, require minimal care and bloom practically nonstop from mid-spring to mid-fall. When established, they also tolerate drought well.

Many landscapers recommend these plants for beginner gardeners. They instantly add vibrant color to newly established gardens. These plants will thrive if you provide them with plenty of sunlight and well-drained soil.

Is lavender hardy enough to survive your hardiness zone? If not, this perennial is hardy in zones 3-8. Although the gray-green leaves smell of mint rather than lavender, the abundance of flowers throughout the growing season is a rewarding close substitute.

For flower color, *Nepeta x faassenii* offers a stunning array of blues. Several varieties are usually labeled lavender-blue, but some venture into the purple territory. For the best blue-flowered type for a bed or border, consult with your favorite nursery or garden center. You may also find some pink or white selections, adding a touch of variety and beauty to your garden.

What is there to choose from? Several varieties, in fact, but two highly recommended varieties include **Cat's Pajamas**, which provide a proliferation of bright indigo-blue blossoms all along the stems. You would think the weight of these flowers would cause the stems to flop to the ground, but they don't—they stand at attention throughout the summer. Another quality is that the calyxes (modified sepals surrounding each blossom) are purple, extending the display later in the season.

Another sought-after variety is **Cat's Meow**, which flaunts gorgeous lavender-blue blossoms. Mature plants grow shorter and form expanding mounds that fill in pathways, limited border areas, and patio containers.

Because of the abundance of flowers, these plants attract many pollinators—bees, butterflies, and even hummingbirds—to partake in the great quantity of nectar. These plants attract every creature that flies or walks on two or four feet.

There is an unfounded fear among some gardeners that, because of the common name of Catmint, these plants will attract the attention of the neighborhood feline population. Not particularly so, in several observations, but an occasional pussycat may be interested. A close relative of this species is *Nepeta cataria*, commonly known as Catnip. That species is the one cats have a more significant attraction to—for some feline reason.

For our purposes, we grow Catmint more for its flower production. The hybrids may have fertility problems producing seeds. Thus, they can make more blossoms all summer. Catnip blooms less but self-seeds aplenty and is more of a foliage plant. It's not particularly attractive to us, but the leaf scent is more to a kitty's liking.

Purr-haps, I have not been purr-suasive enough to extol the virtues of this purr-fect perennial. It would be a catastrophe if you did not include it in a prime location within a garden border. I recommend you go to your garden center or nursery and get your paws on this outstanding perennial. Don't waste any of your nine lives without growing and enjoying the varieties listed above.

I know; please stop all this caterwauling and get on with the next plant, which is...

Pelargonium – Zonal Geraniums

Pelargonium hybridum



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Aside from Impatiens, our common “geraniums” are mass-planted in gardens and containers worldwide. Notice I placed “geraniums” in quotation marks; the correct word should be Pelargoniums. Confused? You should be, but I am not falling into the trap of detailed explanations. I will let Google handle that mind-numbing lesson. Let’s call them geraniums and be done with it.

Most varieties have solid green leaves or are variegated with a contrasting bronze band called a zonal leaf. These small but bushy plants have semi-succulent stems topped with clusters of pink, violet,

white, or salmon-orange, as well as the ever-popular (and traditional favorite) bright red or scarlet blossoms.

These plants prefer to grow in as much sunlight as possible and well-drained, fertile soil. If you meet these conditions, you should have no problem growing them in a garden. Their best feature is their ability to grow in containers. The container soil drains excess water more quickly than garden soil, which is ideal for these plants. These soil conditions mirror those found in their native regions of southern Africa.

They are succulent plants, with stems that retain water even when the soil dries. Surviving in drier soil is vital to having healthy, floriferous plants. This does not mean they behave like cacti; if the ground remains too dry, the plants may not recover and eventually die. The roots and main stem will rot if the soil stays too wet for too long. Please check the soil's dryness every few days, especially if it hasn't rained for a while.

Geraniums sound like good candidates for a carefree garden — which they are “somewhat” — but need dead flower stems clipped off periodically to look their best. What does a few minutes matter each week to perform this essential cosmetic function?

Today, geraniums of all colors (yes, especially red) display themselves in beds, borders, pots, gravesites, and window boxes. Most are seed-raised varieties, and gardeners now treat them as annuals, for they all die by the early onset of winter. What was once a cherished plant is now considered disposable. That is a rather sad treatment of a once-dependable, obedient botanical pet. Yet, friends continue to give other friends and family members rooted or unrooted stem cuttings or side-growing shoots of especially colorful or rare varieties for continued growing and future enjoyment.

Petunia

Petunia hybrida; multiflora; grandiflora



There must be hundreds (well, let's say millions to be on the safe side) of Petunia varieties available for gardeners. Today's hybrid plants offer better growth and disease resistance than the non-hybrid types provided years ago.

In 1995, the first of a new series of long-blooming — if not perpetually blooming — hybrid petunias came on the scene. Instead of growing upward, as its species' heritage suggests, this new hybrid grew horizontally, averaging 3 feet in diameter. It developed the characteristics of a groundcover, carpeting a flower bed throughout the summer.

This new hybrid strain and its developing multicolored ensemble became famously known as the **Wave Series**. It became an instant hit with gardeners for its rapid growth and its ability to keep producing flowers without removing sticky spent blossoms. Older petunia varieties tend to make many seed pods, and eventually the plants cease further flowering. This does not happen with the Wave Petunias!

Not only were they great to cover a bed or border, but they also made excellent hanging basket subjects.

Since 1995, more Wave petunia varieties have been available. You can choose from:

- The “oldie but goodie” **Original Wave** with additional colors;
- **Easy Wave** has slightly taller growth (but still a groundcover);
- **Tidal Wave**, which spreads outward even more, and –
- The **Double Wave** Series has fully double petals.

A few years ago, gardeners could only purchase Wave Petunias in pots or plastic packs. Today, you also have the choice to grow them from expensive seeds. That’s great if you can do so with the right equipment, knowledge, and time, but purchasing these plants from most garden centers or nurseries is more practical for a new gardener.

All new and old varieties of petunias need as much sunlight as possible and fertile, well-drained soil to grow and bloom well. Yes, they require regular watering and light-fertilizing, but spend some time with these flowers and take care of them. They will reward you with endearing accolades and admiration (with some green-eyed envy) from your friends and family.

Pimpernel — Blue Pimpernel; Italian Pimpernel

Anagallis monellii “Skylover”



In 1905, Baroness Emma Orczy (her full name was Emma Magdalena Rozália Mária Jozefa Borbála Orczy de Orci — (yikes, no wonder she shortened it) — wrote and published a historical book about the Reign of Terror at the start of the French Revolution entitled *The Scarlet Pimpernel*.

The main character, a flamboyant Englishman named Sir Percy Blakeney, acts like a Zorro superhero by rescuing people sentenced to death via “Madam Guillotine.” He is a master of disguise and escapes death-defying encounters.

He adopts a red flower, *Anagallis arvensis*, better known as a scarlet pimpernel, as his secret identity “nickname” — just like Spiderman, the Green Hornet, and Batman are today. Sir Percy would have made a bigger or more powerful statement of his hero status if he had used *Anagallis monellii* or the Blue Pimpernel instead.

This plant is a traffic-stopper in full bloom, with hundreds of intense, ultra-true-blue flowers for the entire summer. A native of the Mediterranean region, this maintenance-free plant thrives in dry, sunny locations. It would appreciate fertile, well-drained soil and occasional watering for better growth and bloom, but don't fuss over it.

Look for the “**Skylover Blue**” variety (an ideal name!), which grows only a foot tall, branches out in all directions, and makes a good border edger and an outstanding container plant. If only it were hardy—only to Zone 9—but it is an annual in most gardens.

All superheroes have minor character flaws; this prolific bloomer is no exception. Like its close cousin, *Anagallis arvensis* mentioned above, both species close their petals at dusk, when the day is cloudy, or when a thunderstorm nears. Both species share the common nickname “Poor Man's Barometer.” These plants prefer bright sunlight. Then again, don't we all?

Plumbago — Leadwort; Cape Plumbago or Sky Flower Shrub

Plumbago auriculata “Imperial Blue”



Native to South Africa, those of you living in the southernmost areas of the USA will already know about this plant. Hardy in zone 9 and up, it grows (and blooms) nonstop in warm-to-hot climates.

Although classified as a woody shrub, it can act as a vine, but you need to train it to be one. It does not twine upward but forms expanding branches that can extend along the ground as a ground cover, partially cascade over a wall, or grow upward (with help) by being attached to any support, such as a trellis.

For most of us, it can only be grown in a container as an annual. Even so, it will bloom all summer from semi-woody young plants transplanted in late spring.

When admiring its flowers, you will understand why this plant has the common name of Sky Flower. They appear as if the Phlox-like petals absorbed some of the blueness from the sky. The blue is absolutely gorgeous to the point of being an addiction to constant admiration. Try to find the “**Imperial Blue**” variety, shown above, which has larger flowers than the species. Other forms (rare) are available, with white or pink flowers.

Grow it in full sunlight and fertile, well-drained soil for optimal flowering. This plant tolerates occasional dry soil, so you need not fuss over it. Don't we wish all plants were like this? For containers, try planting them in a size larger than you originally planned. It's like buying a larger shoe size for a growing child.

By fall, before a killing freeze, if possible, transfer the container indoors (such as a cool, dark area of the basement) and allow the woody plant to begin dormancy. The soil should remain dry, but occasionally, give the plant some water to keep the roots alive. By spring, depending on your climate zone, transfer to a bright area and begin regular watering. You should then expect a larger blooming plant throughout the summer.

You may wonder why the “regular” common name is called Leadwort. It was once thought that the plants (possibly the flowers) could cure lead poisoning. Please don't count on that therapy, but it is recommended to avoid handling the plants, as they release a toxic substance that can cause a severe skin rash. Some people wear gloves or wash their hands immediately afterward when planting.

Once planted in the ground or a container, this plant is low-maintenance, so relax and enjoy those outstanding blue blossoms. You may have trouble averting your eyes!

Portulaca — Moss Rose

Portulaca grandiflora



Let's say your garden soil is sun-baked, sandy, gravelly, or stony. What could grow well in those less-than-ideal conditions that would not require constant irrigation and full-time maintenance? Well, some plants listed in this ebook will work, but here is one of the easily overlooked annuals that can thrive and bloom nonstop for you.

Native to South America, specifically to Uruguay, Brazil, and Argentina, Portulaca grows as a groundcover with small succulent leaves. This absorbent nature is critical to their survival in inhospitable, hot, dry environments. This does not mean they can be treated like cacti; they still need occasional watering, but you can save on your water bill by growing these plants.

They detest growing in heavy clay-based soil, as clay can retain water too long and rot roots and stems. If your soil is mainly clay, take the time (and, yes, some work) to add plenty of coarse sand. This would be useful when planting other flowers and vegetables in a garden. Respect your soil; it's the most essential thing concerning gardening!

Portulaca's common name explains everything about them — they look like moss. Still, the flowers appear as single to semi-double-petal roses. Their colors range from white to red, rose pink, orange, and yellow, and include a slew of bicolors with streaks and stripes. They will bloom all summer and into the fall and self-seed plenty, so expect new plants each year.

After the last spring frost, sprinkle seeds across the tilled soil and either water them or let rain settle them into place. Then, it is a waiting game to enjoy their beauty.

Each summer, I drive by a home with a long driveway and separate entrances and exits. Each area contains flower beds showcasing these gorgeous plants. I never see if someone waters them, for the house is about a half-mile away. Who wants to carry water that distance? So, these plants are at the mercy of Mother Nature to give them a drink, but they thrive — each year!

Go wild and crazy by sowing these seeds in your rock garden, edges of sidewalks, or other areas that prove difficult to grow many different flowers.

Ptilotus — Pink Mulla Mulla; Lambs Tails; Pink Pussy Tails; 'Joey'

Ptilotus exaltatus “Joey Improved”



Who could not resist growing an Australian native flower named “Pink Mulla Mulla”? Well, I couldn’t, and I am glad I grew it. My sister also fell in love with it and wants to grow it each year.

There are several ways to describe the flower head of this unique annual. In addition to the above common names, you could describe it as Pink Cat Tails, Pink Spruce Trees, Pink Pinecones, or, as my sister crudely remarked (jokingly), Pink Toilet Brushes. Older gardeners may also call it Pink Bottle-Brushes. Does anyone use this tool anymore?

Anyway, when viewed up close, those eye-catching, if not unbelievable, four-inch-long flower heads are composed of several tiny tubular flowers with vivid neon-pink tips. They separate each other with whitish woolly, fuzzy, fluffy, or spiderweb-ish fibers. The cottony effect looks gray or pale purple in bright sunlight, punctuated with laser-like pink dots. The green leaves eventually form reddish stems topped with those conical, if not comical, flower heads.

I hope I conveyed this description clearly. If not, zoom in on the photo above. Even the honeybees and smaller bumblebees were confused about these flowers. They eventually came to like them, as they constantly sipped the nectar all summer and into the fall.

This plant grows in central Australia's hot and arid regions. Although it grows as a perennial there, it is more of an annual for most gardens elsewhere.

The plants require full sunlight to grow and bloom well for container and bedding use, and the soil must be exceptionally well-drained. The plants thrive in occasional forgetfulness in watering, but will perish in constantly watered soil. For fertilization, incorporate some time-release granules into the potting or bedding soil.

Look for the variety called "**Joey Improved.**" This plant is very low-maintenance, for you do not have to trim back any side shoots or spent flowers; they keep growing from the top of each cone-shaped flower head, while the bottom actually "spent" blossoms blend in with all the other clusters of flowers. Allow the flower heads to continue growing and, ideally, set seed.

As a floral newcomer to most gardeners (when writing this ebook), the seeds are expensive and have a low germination rate. Breeders are working to address those two problems. I purchased 10 seeds for a dollar each (I never did that before) and planted them directly in a 12-inch-diameter plastic pot. I had the good fortune of eight seeds germinating within a few days. Not knowing how far apart to space them, I left them alone, and they filled the pot well. The plants grew slightly over a foot tall when mature and were bushy.

This annual is perfect for growing if you wish to impress the know-it-all garden club members or competitive neighbors. They won't know how to react to these unusual flowers and will be persistent in questioning you about them. Just smile and keep them curious. You have finally earned some praise and respect.

Rosa — Landscape Roses

Rosa species and hybrids



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Although the primary focus of this ebook is on long-blooming herbaceous garden plants, let's not forget about our ever-popular long-blooming shrub roses. They are an excellent example of thriving and blooming while enduring a typically hot, dry summer.

Many outstanding shrub and climbing roses are available in garden centers and online rose nurseries. I can't list them here. My best advice is to visit your favorite garden nurseries and find the ones best suited to your hardiness zone. Also, focus on selecting fragrant varieties.

Unlike their older counterparts, which bloom for a few weeks in late spring or early summer, modern roses can delight us all summer. Shrub roses are accurately advertised as being the most floriferous, longest-blooming, and exceptionally hardy. Over the past few years, new ever-bearing landscape roses (such as the stunning **David Austin English Shrub Roses**) have great potential for all-summer blooming cut-flowers. Other excellent candidates include several more modern hybrid tea roses.

They all offer improved disease and insect resistance, attractive color options, and continuous blooming. They show great potential to endure periodic neglect, particularly in drought conditions. The **Knock Out® Roses**, a variety shown above for example, are an excellent series that requires minimal attention yet blooms all summer and well into the fall.

You may have seen (without realizing it) these Knock Out® roses planted in concrete enclosed flowerbeds outside business locations, including fast-food restaurants, gas stations, and parking lot “beautification” areas (of all things). Even when no natural drought is occurring, these locations do not prioritize regular watering, and the soil is exposed to intense summer heat. I would be surprised if anyone bothers to water these roses. Still, they appear to thrive and bloom without human help and solely rely on Mama Nature’s gift of rainwater.

All roses, including the ever-expanding Knock Out® varieties, appreciate a sunny, well-drained, fertile soil location in beds or borders. Adding mulch will help provide additional fertility, water retention, and root protection over the winter.

Rudbeckia — Black-Eyed Susan

Rudbeckia fulgida and Rudbeckia hirta



You have probably seen these bright, three-inch diameter, yellow or orange daisies blooming in parks, public gardens, office building plantings, and in your neighbor's flower beds or borders. "*Those flowers are beautiful,*" you thought, but gave no further attention until now. For a carefree flower garden, include these plants.

Commonly called "Black-Eyed Susan," this hardy (zones 4 to 9) perennial is famous for being relatively maintenance-free and long-blooming throughout the summer. Bred from wild stock of North American prairie heritage, these plants can tolerate heat, dry soil conditions, and your occasional neglect.

They can suffer from prolonged periods of wet, soggy soil, so ensure your ground is well-drained. Don't worry about fertility, for they seem to grow best (and be healthier) if not over-fertilized.

The only downside of these plants is that they can be short-lived perennials. The blossoms can produce a large amount of seed, which can weaken the plant and may cause it to fail to survive a typical winter. The upside is that you will have new plants springing up in the spring. The best seedlings will grow, and before you know it, they will be blooming.

One of the best and most widely grown varieties is **Goldsturm**, with brilliant yellow petals and a dark brown to black central cone—the “black-eye.” It grows to over two feet tall, is bushy, and produces boatloads of daisies for most of the summer. If you are so inclined, grab the scissors or shears and cut an armload of them as cut flowers for your house.

By late summer, they will appear (understandably so for all those flowers) “worse-for-wear.” Take the time to cut off the spent flower heads and leave the leafy stems. While you are at it, do the same with other tired-looking perennials to make them look “fresher.”

There are less-hardy (zone 8) or annual *Rudbeckia* varieties that are free-flowering and available to gardeners. *Rudbeckia hirta* has gorgeous mixed-color flowers in orange, red, and yellow. It is also a carefree addition for a bed or border.

Many garden centers will offer these plants, along with several other spectacular varieties.

Scabiosa — Pincushion Flower

Silphium laciniatum



This constant blooming annual will supply you with plenty of summer flowers. Not only does it feature colorful petals, but it also provides ample nectar for the neighborhood butterflies.

Scabiosa will also provide desperate small talk when trapped with neighbors, family members, or friends after discussions of work, sports, politics (no, forget that — it's too aggravating), and the weather has run out. Here, you tell them this annual has blooms resembling pincushions, which prompts you to explain what a pincushion is and its ancient function.

Afterward, you can lecture them about this plant's Latin generic name, which refers to the medical condition called scabies, in which tiny mites burrow under the skin's epidermis. Talking about parasites will always liven up a conversation. You will then explain that this plant does not attract skin mites, but rubbing the leaves on the skin can help ease the constant itchiness caused by them.

Congratulations if you have made it this far in discussing this plant, for it is rare to engage in a candid, one-sided discussion of botanical names and histories. I bore most people to tears about such talks, but you're a gardener, and such things interest you (and me).

Oh well, I thought you would be itching to know more about this flower, so let's return to its culture. It is easy to plant in any garden from sown seed or transplants. Most selections are of mixed colors. However, you can get separate colors from online seed catalogs, including the popular "almost black" flower color. Plant them in full sunlight and well-drained soil. Please don't fuss over soil fertility; less-than-ideal conditions are best for plant growth and bloom.

Most growers recommend planting it with taller-growing annuals to provide support and prevent the flowers from flopping. For gardeners in warmer climates, it can re-grow as a perennial and form larger plants by summer. That would be something to admire.

Scaevola — Fanflower

Scaevola aemula



If you are looking for a low-maintenance, super long-blooming, colorful, and “unusually constructed” annual, Australian native *Scaevola* is sure to please. It's odd that Fanflower's nickname is accurate, for it does not display the typical rounded flower shape. All five petals are arranged in a two-dimensional pattern like a handheld paper fan.

Another unusual display is a plant that grows more horizontally than vertically. The constant-blooming shoots extend outward but only grow a foot or so. The effect is gorgeous in any planter or container. Still, unlike other reviewers, I think it looks weird in a hanging basket because the shoots sag slightly and don't cascade downward. If you

prefer a less sprawling plant, you can always clip the ends to encourage “fuller” horizontal growth.

Fanflowers prefer plenty of sunlight and the usual fertile, well-drained soil, but tolerate hot locations and occasional drought without excessive wilting. However, maintain occasional watering for more reliable, consistent summer blooming, especially in containers.

The flower colors range from an eye-popping blueish-purple to cotton candy pink and white. All three colors complement each other perfectly.

Seeds are sometimes offered for sale, but they take a long time to germinate (long dormancy) and slowly develop into blooming adulthood. Fortunately, more garden centers are offering young plants each spring. Make sure you buy several for your planters, containers, beds, and border plantings. I guarantee you will fall in love with this outstanding annual, just like the bees and butterflies have!

Tagetes — Marigold

Tagetes patula and *Tagetes erecta*



Long-time gardeners will roll their eyes at my decision to include these annuals. Any beginner gardener will gladly add them to a low-maintenance garden, a roomy planter, or a container. Well, why not? These plants are inexpensive at garden centers and provide abundant blooms throughout summer and fall. What more can any gardener ask for?

Marigolds are among the easiest annual flowers to grow and raise — especially for children and us child-like adults. The large, tall African Marigolds (*Tagetes erecta*) are available for you to grow alongside the smaller-flowered, shorter-growing French Marigolds (*Tagetes patula*).

Strangely, all these plants are native to Mexico instead of France or the continent of Africa — go figure!

The French varieties are the better choice for continuous blooming. They are lower-growing and provide an abundance of single to double blossoms all season long, with colors ranging from brick red to orange, gold, yellow, bicolors, and even some eye-catching tricolors.

The African types may eventually topple, especially in windy conditions, unless secured to wooden stakes. You can also plant them in larger, heavier, and broader base planters or pots. The petite French types are your best bet in any pot or planter, for they don't get too tall and form a mound shape of constant bloom.

All Marigolds prefer plenty of sunlight and well-drained soil. Any consistently wet ground will rot the roots and stems. They can tolerate less fertile soil, but a light feeding over the summer would be beneficial. They can go several days without water, but if no rain is in sight, take the time to give them a quenching drink.

You can consider them low-maintenance, but occasional clipping of spent flower heads will promote more blooms and a better overall appearance.

Torenia — Wishbone Flower

Torenia fournieri



Throughout the summer, these plants can provide a colorful show in a partly shady garden. They grow well in moist, well-drained, fertile flower beds, containers, and hanging baskets. The plants reach under a foot tall (possibly taller) and become bushy over the summer, with hundreds of blossoms.

The Gloxinia-like flowers are usually brightly bicolored or tricolored in blue, purple, and yellow, with contrasting throat colors. Another nickname for this plant is the “clown flower” because of these “circus” colors. The familiar “wishbone flower” nickname is for the two stamens fusing in the interior center of each blossom. They resemble a turkey wishbone.

If started early in the year, you can raise these plants from seeds (the more economical way) rather than purchasing plants. Garden centers and nurseries may provide them, but not in vast quantities. This neglect is a shame, as these plants have great potential to provide more color and enjoyment in all gardens.

Grow the **Summer Wave Bouquet Series** for its bold, beautiful colors. They grow well in any garden area—sun, shade, beds, or containers. Their colors range from blue-purple to pure yellow with white markings. Although *Torenia* prefers cool growing conditions (typical of the Snapdragon family), this series appears to grow well in hot, humid locations.

Another outstanding variety is “**Duchess Blue & White**,” with velvety purple-rimmed petals and white-to-powder-blue interior blossoms. A perfect yellow spot (called a nectar guide) makes these blossoms stand out.

Other members of the **Duchess Series** have rose-red, pink, pure white, and light-lavender colored flowers. Unlike the Summer Wave varieties, this series prefers deep shade for growth and bloom! Other colorful varieties are available—primarily offered as seeds rather than as plants.

Tropaeolum — Nasturtium

Tropaeolum majus



One of the easiest-to-grow garden annuals, the Nasturtium is also one of the most vibrant plants you can add to your garden. The large blossoms are shades of red, rosy pink, yellow, orange, and white. Many have contrasting markings.

Upright-growing varieties look attractive in most containers, but I recommend growing them in hanging baskets for eye-catching appeal. Here, the long, trailing stems can cascade downward. But a problem arises — Nasturtiums are notorious for “hiding” their flowers behind their oval leaves. Heavens! How do we solve this perplexing dilemma?

A straightforward way is to avoid growing these plants in excessively fertile soil. More nitrogen fertilizer will cause plants to produce more leaves than flowers. Use regular potting soil for hanging baskets, and adding some compost and gravel (for better drainage) will improve flower production. Occasionally, add a weak solution of commercial fertilizer or, better yet, water weekly with “compost tea,” that is, compost steeped in gallons of water.

One variety from seed stores can extend the flower stems farther away from the leaves. The **Alaska Series** features a mix of floral colors with white-splotched variegated leaves. Although not a sprawling plant, this variety holds the flowers above the foliage.

Nasturtiums are easy to grow from seed when sown in warm soil and transplanted after the threat of frost has passed. Garden centers and nurseries rarely offer these annuals because they may not transplant well from pots. You should be able to find the colors you prefer from seed companies. Hummingbirds like the red shades but will settle for whatever blossom colors are available to suckle the nectar.

Verbena

Verbena hybrida



Verbenas have small, tubular flowers arranged into ball-like clusters produced throughout the summer and fall. Their leaves are dark green, highly resistant to mildew, and exhibit a vigorous spreading or trailing growth habit, making them suitable as ground cover but more attractive cascading from a hanging basket. You can also grow them in containers that overflow onto patios, decks, or window boxes.

Many colors are available, but the most noticeable are bicolors, which provide an eye-catching spectacle all season long. Some outstanding varieties offer the bonus of fragrant flowers. To me, the scent resembles *Convalaria* (Lily-of-the-Valley). Please remember that scented varieties are the exception; many scentless varieties are available.

These popular plants prefer full sun to partial shade and fertile, well-drained soil. They can be hardy perennials if you live in Zones 9 to 10, but we must accept them as annuals for most of us. You can easily propagate them by rooted cuttings. However, you can find sections with tiny rootlets pre-forming on the leafy stems.

These outstanding plants are usually considered low-maintenance, but for the best flowering results, occasionally remove spent flower clusters and provide regular watering and fertilizing to ensure all-summer enjoyment.

Zinnia

Zinnia elegans and hybrids



You may have noticed a pattern in this ebook: several of the carefree, beginner-friendly flowers. We previously reviewed Calendulas, Cornflowers, Shasta Daisies, and Marigolds. They and Zinnias belong to the same broad plant family, the Composites. They all have similar floral structures.

Like them, Zinnias are easy to grow from self-sown seeds and to nurture in any garden. What is surprising is that they combine the characteristics of all these other flowers. They have a broad range of vivid colors, large enough seeds to handle (especially for children), can be grown for cut flowers, and come in different sizes. The most important quality is being able to bloom for most of the summer.

As an annual, you can sow or sprinkle the flattened seed of Zinnias in a well-prepared, well-drained bed exposed to as much sunlight as possible for best blooming.

What makes them unique is the flowers' vivid colors, especially the multicolored varieties. Plus, it also helps when multitudes of butterflies come to land on them for nectar.

There is a wide variety to choose from, but I recommend growing a hybrid. Why hybrids? The simple answer is resistance to the powdery mildew fungal disease. Old-fashioned Zinnias are prone to this disease. Hybrid plants are more disease-resistant. Thus, they grow and bloom better.

Hybrids are the way to go for more enjoyment. You can find hybrid Zinnia seeds of many colors from many seed catalogs and garden centers.

For maximum butterfly enjoyment, sow the seeds of the multi-colored variety called **Lilliput**. I read that butterflies absolutely love visiting this variety. It is an heirloom type and not a hybrid. As I mentioned before, because it is not a hybrid, it is susceptible to powdery mildew by mid to late summer.

Conclusion

As usual, when I arrive at the conclusion sections of my ebooks, I fear that I have neglected or overlooked plants that, in hindsight, should have been included. This ebook is no exception. My apologies if I overlooked something blatantly obvious.

There must be many other annuals and perennials that bloom practically all summer and possibly until a fall frost. If you encounter other plants not listed in this ebook, please, by all means, plant them in your garden, and enjoy weeks of vibrantly colorful petals.

There is a stipulation, though. Please remember that flowering plants are not naturally everblooming; their primary objective is seed formation for the next generation. By clipping off spent flowers, you interrupt this process, causing the plant to produce more flowers. Weirdly, this doesn't seem kind. Oh well, such is life in a garden for our own enjoyment.

For those of you with a warm botanical heart, let some plants keep their seed-bearing stems to propagate next year's generation. Now — go ahead and enjoy your bounty of beautiful blossoms all summer long!

Thank you for reading this ebook.

I hope this publication has inspired you to explore the many ever-blooming annual and perennial plants available to grow from seed or young plants. Your garden should always be a source of pride, showcasing an abundance of colorful petals throughout the growing season.

Please visit my author website, <https://gedwinvarner.com> , for information about my other gardening ebooks and contact information.

About the Author

G. Edwin Varner grew up on a farm, helping his father in the crop fields and assisting his mother in the flower and vegetable gardens. This experience and learning led him to receive a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology with a minor in Botany.

He successfully owned and operated a fragrant flower mail-order nursery for twenty years. Unlike most mail-order nurseries publishing colorful but expensive pictorial catalogs, his frugal catalog extensively described the flowers he grew. He once said, "I write a thousand words worth a picture in my catalogs." Today, he has the same style of writing (thankfully with fewer words) through a variety of enjoyable and informative ebooks. This time, the ebooks include color photos of each flower.

He encourages you to cultivate something unique and beautiful in your gardens. His motto is "Read about it, see it, grow it, and enjoy it!"

G. Edwin Varner lives in a rural area of northeastern Ohio, USA.