

Your Carefree Garden Flowers

A close-up photograph of a vibrant pink lily flower. The flower is the central focus, with its six petals fully open and showing a distinct yellow and orange center. The petals have a subtle texture and are slightly ruffled at the edges. In the background, there are green leaves and other flowers, some in bloom and some as buds, creating a lush garden setting. The lighting is bright, highlighting the colors of the flower.

G. Edwin Varner

Your Carefree Garden Flowers

G. Edwin Varner

Published in 2020.

While every precaution has been taken in the preparation of this book, the author assumes no responsibility for errors or omissions, or for damages resulting from the use of the information contained herein.

YOUR CAREFREE GARDEN FLOWERS

First edition. March 30, 2020.

Copyright © 2020 G. Edwin Varner.

Written by G. Edwin Varner.

Preface

This ebook helps new gardeners discover beautiful low-maintenance plants for their flower gardens. Many of these plants provide outstanding color, including some with delightful fragrances. This guide is not the definitive listing of all these types of “carefree” plants.

The information on each plant may contain inaccuracies about their growing conditions and hardiness. Each plant has its USDA hardiness zones, best growth conditions, and my recommended varieties to find and grow. Please be aware these plants may not be available, discontinued or replaced for better varieties by nurseries.

The following plants use their Latin name first then by a common name or names.

The digital photos are of the flowers at my home, garden centers, public gardens, and Creative Commons (CC0) licensed images.

Introduction

Everyone wants to create dazzlingly beautiful flowers for their home. The problem is, who has the time to sow, plant, and care for all those many flowering plants available for a home gardener?

The solution is growing carefree, low-maintenance, and easy-to-grow flowers.

I have written this ebook for beginning home gardeners to learn which low maintenance flowering plants are available to create a beautiful garden. The solution is not expensive or overly complicated. The plan is growing certain perennials, annuals, and bulbs that, once planted, will grow well with less work and care from you.

Your busy life should not keep you from enjoying the beauty and relaxing contentment of flowers. There are many flowers you can grow without too much of your help. By giving them a proper place to live and grow, along with the occasional watering and upkeep, they will reward you with beauty, but also with pride of doing something incredible.

Low-maintenance and easy-care; probably the most reassuring and goal-seeking phrases for a happy life. Think about it. What if everything ever created — machines and our own body — came with a guarantee of very few problems, and less time-consuming upkeep?

Yes, we need to have periodic maintenance, such as changing the oil or eating and bathing. Most of the time, we can activate “autopilot” and cruise along virtually trouble-free. If only that were always true. We need to monitor occasionally how everything is progressing and correct specific abnormalities and problems.

Flower (and vegetable) gardening is not one of those “autopilot” activities. There is a problem with time — many people do not have the luxury of spending hours during the week to care for the plants. Although considered a leisurely activity, gardening can be time-

consuming, especially during the workweek and weekend. There is help in growing your own flowers while having more free time.

Spend a few minutes each weekend to admire the flowers and double-check to water them if the soil is dry and cut off spent blooms. There, easy-peasy!

This ebook will instruct you which flowers to plant as to establish gorgeous blooms from spring until fall. It helps to develop a few rules when attempting gardening for the first time:

- Landscapers consider perennials and bulbs “the backbone” of any flower garden, for they will regrow each year. They have a limited blooming time (usually for a couple weeks or more) but produce a stunning display.
- Annuals will give you longer blooming and enjoyment, for they mature in one growing season. Some types will reseed themselves to grow again next spring.
- You need to determine where to plant a flower garden. Light conditions are the most essential factor in deciding what plants to grow. Most plants require as much sunlight as possible to grow and bloom well. Some perennial plants require more shady locations. Is the soil fertile? Does the soil drain excess water? Soil that retains surface water for too long of a time will kill most plants. Too dry of ground will need more watering during the summer.
- Don't grow flowers to impress other people. Sorry, but most people will not care. They will say the flowers are pretty but will not dwell on them. Instead, grow the following flowers to impress yourself. They are your “babies” and your vision of loveliness. Grow what you will enjoy.
- Don't be a perfectionist. Many gorgeous flowers do not have to be the latest-and-greatest varieties hyped about in catalogs and gardening magazines. It's all about advertising. Hybrid varieties are best to grow for they exhibit better disease and insect resistance.

The following flower garden plants are classified as being low-maintenance. I want to say “plant them, water them and forget about them,” but that is not truthful. Spend time and a little work in making sure they are growing well.

Always remember, a good-looking garden makes any new gardener look like a professional! If all is well, then sit in your comfortable lawn chair, sip an ice-cold drink, and admire your beautiful creations. Invite your friends and family over and brag to them about your stunning accomplishment. Proudly proclaim that you grew these fantastic flowers all by yourself.

Take a bow and pat yourself on the back. You deserve this tribute, first time, and now, all-time gardener!

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

Low-Maintenance Perennial Plants

You do not have to plant every perennial known to horticulture in your garden. It is perfectly acceptable to grow one or a few types. When I owned and operated a plant nursery, I always recommended my customers to grow the ones that “caught their eye” immediately.

Always review which types of perennials to include in your garden based on its surroundings. Your garden may receive more sunlight or shade, so choose those plants adapted to those areas.

It is all based on narrowing down the field on what can thrive in your particular garden. That is the time-consuming part of gardening — the choosing of the plants. But it can be an enjoyable process! For our purposes here, we want to choose carefree, maintenance-free plants.

Many of those listed below can adapt to changeable conditions.

Achillea – Yarrow



Achillea millefolium – Considered a weed, wild-growing Yarrow thrives in disturbed areas. I believe its clusters of white flowers are not “eye-popping” pretty. Through hybridization with other related species, growers have created very colorful varieties with a less aggressive weedy growth habit. These types have proven to be great for growing in perennial flower beds. Not only are the clusters of flowers beautiful, but the plants exhibit carefree growth. They are a great example of one of your “plant and forget” perennials.

As a member of the Aster family, these plants can grow to three feet tall or more, depending on the fertility of the soil. Newer hybrids grow less tall and are bushy.

Famous for cottage and wild gardens, this hardy perennial (zones 3 to 9) works best in an informal flower bed, such as one devoted to wildflowers. Once planted, you will not have to care for it, but spend the time admiring the colorful flower clusters.

These “flattened” flower clusters, called corymbs, can be white, light to dark pink, red, or bright yellow. They bloom all summer if planted in full sun and well-drained soil. The dark-green to silvery-white, serrated leaves (depending on the variety) are attractive and pungently herbal scented.

Asclepias – Mexican Milkweed



Asclepias curassavica – Another common name for this plant is “Mexican Bloodflower.” Not all members of the Milkweed family are hardy perennials; some are tropical and grow as annuals in cold locations.

This colorful, frost-tender plant is more of a tropical species but raised anywhere. In warmer, southern gardens, this species will be hardy. You can sow seeds (if inclined to do so) eight weeks before the last spring frost date, but many larger garden centers offer potted plants.

Like most Milkweed species and varieties, they grow best in full or partial sunlight and in well-drained, fertile soil. Look for the types called **Silky Gold** or **Silky Red** (or color name variations starting with Silky) at nurseries and garden centers.

Mature plants can grow to over three feet tall and wide. It possesses all the typical characteristics of the hardy Milkweeds, such as having the milky latex sap that bleeds out from an injured part of the plant.

This species also attracts the Monarch Butterflies (*Danaus plexippus*) as a food resource for its larva.

I singled out this species and its varieties for your low-maintenance garden instead of the hardiest species. Those species are larger, and coarser-growing with less showy blooms. They are more suitable for a wildflower garden.

Aster (or Symphyotrichum)



Aster dumosus or *dumosum*, or *Symphyotrichum dumosus* (or *dumosum*) and *varieties* – Botanists are at it again changing the Latin name of common garden plants, and now it's Aster's turn. What a disaster in learning the new genus titles! Lord help us all!

Oh, forget about it! Let's stick to naming an Aster, an Aster. Now I can sleep better.

I think there's never a disaster growing an Aster in any garden. Botanists call Asters, Daisies, Chrysanthemums, and related daisy look-alikes, "composite flowers." They all look to be one large flower but constructed of many smaller ones grouped together. More colorful and showy ray flowers surround the central disk of tubular blossoms.

From the Latin word meaning “star,” Asters bloom in the late summer and into fall. If you need an all-purpose, hardy and carefree plant, you cannot go wrong having Asters in your garden. Although they bloom alongside Chrysanthemums, they are more vigorous than the “mums,” and their flowers are an outstanding blue to purple. You can never have enough blue flowers in any garden.

One additional attribute is, Asters are much easier to take care of. You plant them in a sunny, well-drained, fertile ground, and let them become a bushy mass of purple blossoms. How easy is that?

New types are being selected each year with an assortment of colors and growth habits. A new variety is **Sapphire Mist** (*Aster dumosus* or *Aster dumosum* — even the growers and sellers get confused about exact names). This type has dazzling blue daisies from midsummer to fall and grows as a cushion, or as a low-growing mound.

Another recommended variety to grow is **October Skies**. It has become famous for the incredible beauty of the purple-blue daisy-like blossoms, which smother the plant in late summer and throughout the fall. It is not the flowers but the leaves that have the intense fragrance of peppermint. Wow! Now isn't that something? Handle or brush against the foliage to release the aroma. But those gorgeous flowers will always steal the show.

This variety grows to only 16 inches tall and is bushy.

Asters attract butterflies and make excellent cut flowers. By all means, plant it with Chrysanthemums for a real rainbow of vivid autumn colors. Most varieties are hardy from zones 3 to 8 and exhibit other colors such as bright pink and snow-white.

Chrysanthemum



Chrysanthemum x morifolium – A debate could start (hopefully not an insult shouting match so common these days) on whether “mums” are a carefree, low-maintenance perennial. There are several “pros and cons” facts associated with them, but the major con would, most likely, be hardiness.

Over the years, I have had a love-hate relationship with them, for they grow well during the summer and bloom spectacularly in the fall, but after a cold winter, they fail to survive. The key to finding happiness with these plants is to grow varieties bred to withstand Old Man Winter’s wrath.

Years ago, I planted a bright yellow double variety (alas; I forget its name, but shown in the above photo.) I remember the University of

Minnesota bred and developed it for vigor and hardiness. The tag said it was super-hardy (zone 3), and I tried it. I expected the usual result of declaring the plant DOA (dead-on-arrival) by the following spring. It survived then and thrives now for it looks better each year — something I wish I could say of myself.

I gave away rooted cuttings to my neighbors, and their plants are thriving. I must add, my neighbors don't have a clue on how to take care of them, but their plants grow and bloom abundantly from late summer until late fall.

I have come to three conclusions on how to grow Chrysanthemums:

- Find and grow real hardy varieties rated for zone 3 and developed by the University of Minnesota.
- Plant them in full sun to partial afternoon shade in well-drained, fertile soil.
- Leave them alone. Yes, this works well for my neighbors, and should also for you.

I recommend trimming the growth shoot tips once in the early summer to make the plants bushy and bloom more by fall. Then again, the neighbors never do this — at least, I never see them doing it. Oh well, maybe there is an important lesson here. We should not coddle garden plants too much and let them “fend for themselves.”

Most chrysanthemums sold as potted plants (in bloom) may not establish themselves in a garden. Growers do not breed these varieties for hardiness but for flower color and size.

Coreopsis – Tickseed



Coreopsis tinctoria; *lanceolata*; and *verticillata* (shown above) – These attractive annual and perennial plants are wonderful to include in any low-care garden. The perennial varieties are easy to grow, and once established in your garden, become a no-fuss, problem-free attraction.

By some accounts, there are over 80 species of Coreopsis. About half are native to the prairie areas of the entire central length of North America. The other half are native to regions in Central and South America. With these species, breeders have been very busy creating colorful hybrids.

Varieties now found in garden centers have stunning red, pink, orange, and vibrant yellow petals with additional bi-colors, bizarre stripes, and

splotches — all on plants ranging in different heights. Heavens to Betsy, how can anyone decide what to plant in a garden?



Let's look at an old, but still popular annual species, *Coreopsis tinctoria* or the **Plains Coreopsis**. Tall growing to over three feet, it sports a multitude of eye-catching bright yellow daisies with brownish-red centers. You will always find new plants sprouting each spring from its self-sown seeding.

For a perennial species/variety having pure yellow double flowers, you can't go wrong planting *Coreopsis lanceolata* 'Early Sunrise'. It grows shorter and bushier than others of its kind but is easy to grow, makes excellent cut flowers, and trouble-free for your enjoyment.

Coreopsis verticillata 'Threadleaf Coreopsis' is also a perennial species. Still offered by nurseries, a variety called **Zagreb** (named after the Croatian capital of Zagreb), has a mass of thread-like, dark green

foliage. Single-petaled, bright yellow blossoms cover the plant most of the summer. It is hardy to Zone 4.

My elderly neighbor (age 90+) has a large cluster of this plant thriving for over 15 years. She neglects caring for it, for she now rarely gardens because of being allergic to bee and wasp stings. Her plants keep getting more beautiful each year.

Coreopsis will bloom all summer if planted in full sunlight, and fertile, well-drained soil.

The plants dislike clay-based soils and prefer a more sandy or gravelly medium. The leading killer of all perennial plants is excessive water retention in the ground during the winter. Too much water (and ice) will kill the central growth crown.

To make Coreopsis become a true low-maintenance garden item, take the time when planting them to incorporate plenty of sand or pea-size gravel in the soil.

Echinacea – Coneflower



Echinacea – Coneflowers are big, sturdy, daisies-on-steroids blooming throughout the summer. They are very hardy and make an excellent cut flower for bouquets. They are also butterfly “magnets,” for they seem to attract all the butterflies in the neighborhood.

They are carefree and thrive in the hot sun, dry soil, and, for a limited time, wet ground. Hardy from zones 3 to 10, this stunning perennial will grow to about two to three feet tall.

The colorful varieties offered today are nothing like the ones grown in your great grandmother’s garden. Years ago, it was an under-appreciated wildflower-ornamental plant, but that has all changed. Hybridizers or plant breeders woke up to its exciting possibilities and made an excellent plant even better.

There are several new varieties available for your garden based on new flower colors and fragrances not found in the older species-based plants. Be prepared to experience a whole new way to enjoy and grow these bone-hardy, carefree, and dependable perennials.

Their large flowers bloom in late June and continue all summer. They will eventually look rather untidy by late summer and fall, so, if you wish, clip off the spent flowers.

Echinacea derives its name from the Greek “echinos” meaning “hedgehog” for its spiky center 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 offered. It is challenging to narrow down one or two types. Many of these are available as plants by several nurseries and larger garden centers.

Try to avoid seed-grown strains, for they revert back to less outstanding color, and will have smaller blossoms.

Geranium – Bloody Cranesbill or Hardy Geranium



Geranium sanguineum – To avoid confusion, we do not associate these plants with the annual varieties (also called Geraniums) which their botanically correct name is *Pelargonium*. They too are easy-to-grow flowers and will be discussed later.

The common name of this Geranium is Bloody Cranesbill (yeah, as if everything referred to with blood is cute and cuddly). This descriptive name is about the seed-head resembling a Crane bird's head and beak. Botanists associate the blood reference with the red coloration of the frost-chilled fall leaves. What a relief, for I was afraid it held a more sinister and gory explanation.

Here in the USA, this is one of the commonly grown “true” Geraniums. It has excellent hardiness (zones 3 to 9), and a large flush of small blueish to pink blossoms on branching stems. It blooms heavily in the late spring with acceptable re-blooming throughout the summer.

The plant forms an attractive low-growing but spreading bush as it becomes older. It is easy to grow in full sun to partial shade, but (like all other Geraniums and Pelargoniums) needs well-drained, fertile soil to grow and survive. Soil that is always wet will spell doom for them.

Some botanical references, backed-up with grower opinions, determine this species can tolerate hot, dry conditions, and some neglect, better than other *Geranium* species. If a clump of plants looks rather “gnarly” by late summer, a few minutes of trimming brown areas will make it look decent again.

This is a wonderful plant any new gardener should find a spot to grow in a garden.

Hellebore – Lenten Rose



Helleborus orientalis and ***Helleborus x hybridus*** – You will probably question my sanity if I described a hardy perennial blooming in the dead of winter and continue doing so until late spring. Well, being an avid gardener is grounds for advanced peculiarities. Still, there is such a plant, and botanists call it Hellebore.

Who says you can't garden during the bleakness of winter? While we look outside from our warm homes to a snow-covered garden, bleak with no apparent signs of spring, what we can't observe is what is happening under the snowpack. This perennial (zones 4 to 9) is slowly inching its stems and blossoms up out of the snow. It has evergreen leaves, and some remain — worse for wear — during the winter, but fresh new leaves will also slowly emerge.

As a new gardener and wish to impress your non-gardening, or those know-it-all gardening friends, here is a very unusual “leave-it-be” perennial. Its common name is Lenten Rose and is a member of the Buttercup family and not to the Rose family. Lenten is also a reference to the Christian season of Lent. It is during this time when this plant blooms — give or take a week or two. While most Northern Hemisphere garden plants are dormant, this one springs to life even in January and continues to grow and bloom into May.

One species of Hellebore, called **Christmas Rose** (*Helleborus niger*), can bloom in December. Now that is a great Christmas gift for a gardener!

These plants are great for planting in semi-shady locations. Like many early spring-blooming bulbs and perennials, they love the early spring sunshine, but, as the season transforms into summer, can't tolerate the intense sunlight and heat. It also appreciates well-drained, fertile, moist soil. Adding lime (calcium carbonate) will also help in better growth and development.

Most mature plants will grow to almost a foot tall and wide but form larger clumps or colonies over many years.

The flower colors range from white to purple (almost black) with all shades of chartreuse green, pale-yellow, light-lavender, and some reddish-pink added for additional pizzazz. Virtually all the blossoms have contrasting spots, veins, or streaks. Please understand these flowers are not especially vibrant and blend in with the dark green leaves.

Being an evergreen, before the onslaught of winter, trim back or remove the older leaves which are, by now, appear gnarly and scruffy looking. The removal of them helps the development of new leaves and flowers. It also makes the garden look a little tidier.

Over the past decade, there has been a massive interest in creating new colorful varieties. You can discover many of these plants in larger garden centers and online nurseries.

Hemerocallis – Daylily



Hemerocallis fulva hybrids – If you want to include what we consider the best candidate to plant in a low-maintenance garden, this perennial is ideal.

Hemerocallis, in Greek translation, means “day beauty” for each flower lasts only one day. Still, the overall plant bloom-time can last several weeks. They grow over three feet tall (with the flower stalks), and grow best in part to full sunlight. They are hardy from zones 3 to 10.

Daylilies are not “true lilies” but resemble them. They grow all over the world, and each country believes it is native there. It is actually native to China, Japan, North, and South Korea. Because of its superior hardiness and adaptability to various growing conditions (not to

mention it's outstanding, simplistic beauty), it quickly spread worldwide.

The common daylily species, *Hemerocallis fulva*, known as tiger-lily, orange-daylily, tawny-lily, and ditch-lily grows near roadside ditches. Foolish people say it is a weed, but many smart homeowners have adopted it as an easy-to-grow bedding display. This daylily is the quintessential flower of summer. As with most Daylilies, this species prefers to grow in full to partly sunny locations.

Today, there are billions (not really, but close to it — someday) of *Hemerocallis* varieties worldwide. Your nearby nursery or garden center will have a few colorful potted selections. If you enjoy ordering plants online, there are plenty of specialty nurseries to choose from. They always offer bare-root plants.

Plant all daylilies in well-drained, fertile soil from containers or by 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.

Heuchera – Coral Bells



Heuchera X hybrida (all sorts of species genetically mixed together)
– Let's think of this plant and its sister intergeneric hybrid called *Heucherella* (reviewed next), as the perennial equivalent of the annual Coleus plant — discussed farther ahead.

Years ago, this North American native perennial was a dull green to lightly copper-colored plant. The only redeeming quality was the numerous little red, bell-shaped flowers on slender stems. Not only are they pretty, but they also attract the occasional hummingbird. Breeders and growers knew it had the potential to form beautiful shade plants. They were right and later created stunningly colorful leafy plants.

Most of the attention has been with variations of leaf color. Some plants have solid monochromatic colors while others sport multiple shades.

There are chartreuse, bright coppery-orange, rusty-red, silvery-white, and purple-black varieties.

To get the best leaf colors, this hardy perennial (zones 3 to 8) appreciate growing in partial shade, morning sunlight, and then shade for the afternoon. Constant sunlight (along with dry soil) will “burn” the leaves — making large brown grotesque splotches and dead leaf edges. Only in zone 3 and 4 gardens is where these plants can grow in full sunlight.

Flower colors are also variable from bright red, pink, and white. Blooming begins from late spring to mid-summer. Don't worry if you have a problematic shady area that may be too dark. Here, concentrate on the flowers instead of the leaf colors. I have seen stunning displays for green-leaf Coral Bells with bright white blossoms. The small, but numerous flowers resembled strings of bright LED lights. It was mesmerizing!

The plants will grow best in well-drained, fertile, moist to occasional dry soil. Mature plants will grow into bushy two feet tall clumps and have few if any insect or disease problems.

Many colorful varieties are available as bare-root rhizomes or potted plants in most garden centers.

Heucherella – Foamy Bells



Heuchera x Tiarella hybrid varieties – Though sounding like a name of a not-so-famous sister of Cinderella, this genus is a genetic cross of the above *Heuchera* with a *Tiarella* plant (described later). I know, it's all so confusing! Plant breeders are always dabbling into crossing this plant with that plant — usually with disappointing results — but this is a beautiful creation of colorful leafy plants.

Breeders amplified the colorful leaves of *Heuchera* with additional contrasting colors. The *Tiarella* genes contribute to extra disease resistance but also greater adaptability to sunny and hotter climates. The plants will still grow (and look) best in partly to entirely shady locations.

In 2002, the first colorful foliage *Heucherella* appeared in garden centers. Later, breeders created even more genetically enhanced hybrids. These modern hybrid varieties made larger maple-shaped leaves with vivid colors and patterns with higher tolerance to heat and sunlight.

Today, these plants are gaining in popularity for planting in partly shady locations. Part of this appeal is in growing them as a multi-colored groundcover. Most new varieties are smaller, bushy, and slowly spread.

As for the flowers, they are abundant on tall but branching, slender stems. The blossoms are much smaller than those of *Heuchera* but compensate by having more. American growers dubbed them the nickname of “Foamy Bells” for the flowers resembles sea-foam instead of coral. They bloom from mid-to-late spring with shades of pink and white. Hummingbirds and butterflies in your neighborhood will happily visit these blossoms.

Raise these colorful plants in well-drained, fertile, and moist soil. Having the *Tiarella* heritage, they can tolerate dry ground but can quickly perish in soggy locations. Their hardiness is still extreme — from zones 4 to 9.

There is an increasing number of new, colorful varieties introduced each year. Garden centers and nurseries may offer only a few, but specialist online nurseries will provide plenty of them.

Hosta



Hosta plantaginea (along with other species and hybrids) – Well, here we are with the most grown shade-loving perennial for any garden. What would a flower garden be without these outstanding plants? My first guess would be a bare or weedy garden.

With hardiness (zones 3 to 9), adaptability, gorgeous flowers, and beautiful leaves, this perennial is number one for low-maintenance shade garden enjoyment.

Hostas prefer to grow in partial sunlight (early morning sun is best) and then to full shade. Many varieties can grow in full sun, but only for a limited time. Their leaves, though, will suffer by developing ugly brown splotches. Variegated varieties are the most at risk for this to occur. The

lesson here is to be careful about where to place your plants around your house or home.

Planting Hostas in shadier, north-facing areas or a nearby woodland location, in well-drained, fertile, but moist soil will make them look fabulous. Always make sure the ground never collects pools of water, which causes the roots to rot.

The height of Hosta plants varies, but their flower stalks can top to over three feet tall or more — especially for the larger cultivars.

Today, there is a gazillion (well, close to it) Hosta species and their varieties for any shade garden. The trouble is, which plants will you grow? A trip to your nearest garden center will provide you with a confusing assortment to ponder.

Don't neglect mail-order, online nurseries, for they always have rare and delectable offerings to brighten your shady acres.

Hydrangea



Hydrangea macrophylla – 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 day, but one major prerequisite is having them grow in consistently moist soil. This requirement is especially crucial for hot climate gardeners to provide.

The reason for providing moist soil is that these plants have large leaves and extensive growth. When raised in partial to entirely shady locations, the plants can experience periodic dry soil and develop no problems.

Let's begin with your commonly found species and its varieties, *Hydrangea macrophylla* or **Big-Leaf or French Hydrangeas**

These plants always remind me of my old high school and college chemistry classes. It involves determining whether an unknown solution had an acidic or basic pH based on color. Hydrangea “flowers” have a similar method of showing different colors when grown in different soil pH levels. What we think of as being flowers are actually bracts or modified leaves. The true flower structures are small and located in the center of these bracts.

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

But what happens to Hydrangeas having white bracts? Here, you do not have to add the chemicals for the plants will remain white no matter what the pH is of the soil.

I advise a word of caution when adding these chemicals to the soil. They can damage or “sicken” surrounding plants from the significant change of the soil pH.

Growers label these plants as being perennials or semi-woody shrubs. They begin growth as being herbaceous, like any other perennial, but later transform into woody hollow stems by fall. They are hardy to zones 5 to 9, but lesser zones are problematic. Severe cold conditions will kill the new growth buds on the older stems.

Most Hydrangeas are low-maintenance shrubs, 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 of not “messing things up” when pruning. They bloom on current growing stems and also provide longer enjoyment from spring to fall.

Today’s newer varieties now bloom from new growth 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 and have sturdy stems to hold up the massive blooms.

You will find many of these new varieties in larger garden centers or nurseries.

Iris – German Bearded and Siberian Iris



Iris germanica and sibirica – There are many varieties of the **Large Bearded Iris** or **German Iris** (*Iris germanica*) available to gardeners. Botanists call them bearded for the prominent fuzzy-fluffy yellow or orange hairs on the inner petals.

They grow from rhizomes, or horizontal, thickened stems. You plant them shallowly (horizontally with the ground) with one half of the rhizome sticking out of the soil. You can do this from spring to early fall. Over time, new rhizomes branch outward and form compact clumps. One word of caution: try not to step on them, especially during the winter.

Grow these Iris in full sunlight and well-drained soil. The height of the flower stems may reach 3 feet tall and will bloom in the late spring or

early summer for about two weeks or more. Yes, not a long bloom time, but it is stunning when they do with all those vivid colors. All are hardy from zones 3 to 9.

Check your local garden centers for the larger-blossomed, modern varieties. Online nurseries specializing in Iris offer more selections, listing ones that are fragrant, and historically rare.

My recommendation is to find and purchase varieties listed as being “re-bloomers” or having the ability to bloom again in mid to late summer. Hey, here’s a way to impress your “expert” gardening friends that you can choose the very best of flowers. Also, never turn down flowers that have the potential to grow and bloom all summer.



Another important species is the **Siberian Iris** (*Iris sibirica*). This species and its many colorful varieties do not have a thickened rhizome like the German Iris but concentrate more on leaf and root development. The numerous stem-producing leafy shoots and massive

intermingling of thickened, fibrous roots are the hallmark of this gorgeous Iris.

Although named Siberian, this Iris is not from Siberia but from the Alps terrain of central Europe, across into Turkey, and then into southeastern areas of Russia. Why it was named “Siberian” is anyone’s guess, but it stuck.

The species and its many colorful varieties are hardy from zones 3 to 8. They prefer to grow in sunny to partly sunny locations with fertile, moist soil. They cannot tolerate constant wet ground or excessively dry areas.

The leaf-blades can grow tall — including the flower stems — and can form a large clump. Flowering begins in mid-spring and lasts until early summer. Compared to Bearded Iris, this species blooms slightly longer and has a more bright and colorful display.

You can find a few varieties in garden centers, but online nurseries will offer other rare types. One variation you must grow is **Caesar’s Brother** having dark blue-purple flowers highlighted with vividly colorful lines called nectar guides.

All Siberian Iris are carefree perennials, and they make ideal plantings to include in any carefree border or landscape project. It helps if you perform periodic maintenance such as watering well once a week during dry spells and cutting off spent flower stalks. This helps to prevent excessive seed production and makes the plants look better and healthier. By Fall, shear-back the grass-like leaves to about a foot tall.

Leucanthemum – Shasta Daisy



Leucanthemum x superbum or *Chrysanthemum X superbum* – 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 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** (*Leucanthemum x superbum* or *Chrysanthemum maximum*) 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

stock, this perennial is your basic carefree plant.

You can grow these perennials from seed, but purchasing plants can give quicker blooming. They are hardy from zones 4 to 9 and love to bask in full to partial sunlight. Make sure you raise them in well-drained, fertile soil for best growth and bloom.

Monarda – Bee Balm



Monarda didyma – Related to the mint family, this very hardy perennial (zones 3 to 9) sports huge and colorful flower-heads. It is native to the eastern half of North America and has familiar names such as Bee Balm and Oswego Tea. They are bold looking perennial plants with the leaves having a robust minty-orange fragrance.

These plants enjoy full sunlight to part shade to grow and bloom well. Their large blossoms also act as magnets to attract all the hummingbirds and butterflies in your neighborhood. Maybe not all but a good number of them.

There are many varieties to choose from, but **Jacob Cline** is one of the largest and most famous of the bright red types. The magnificent, large, red flowers are incredible to see, and they appear all summer. This

variety also has excellent mildew disease resistance. This is an essential quality for Monardas (and other garden plants) that are susceptible to fungal problems. You do not want to spend your quality time trudging around with a sprayer filled with fungicide.

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

Peony – Herbaceous and Tree Peonies



Paeonia officinalis; *Paeonia* × *suffruticosa* varieties – These gorgeous plants do not need an introduction since gardeners have treasured them for generations. There are many recorded instances where they can outlive the people who plant them, thus growing with the future generations of a person’s family.

Noted for their large and fluffy flowers on leafy stems, they bloom in late spring to early summer. These plants need a chilling or cold time (winter), which stimulates flower buds to form.

Many varieties of peonies have different fragrances such as lemons, roses, honey, spices, and musk. Sometimes, a type may smell of dead fish. Do extensive research before purchasing any peony, so you don’t get something “fishy”.

One major classification of Peonies is those that are herbaceous. This means they grow like “regular” perennials, but sprout from growth buds on thick, woody, underground rhizome stems (or roots). This structure appears like a gnarly chunk of wood. By winter, all growth dies above ground, but new spring-growth buds live under the surface.

Plant all peonies in full sunlight and well-drained, fertile soil. They are hardy from zones 3 to 8.

The regular maintenance for these outstanding perennials is providing support for the flower stems, and also for periodic removal of the spent blossoms. Over countless years of breeding, Peony blossoms have become larger and heavier. So heavy, they can bend over to the ground. Not lovely, but what can a gardener do? One easy method is to purchase metal support rings (something similar to tomato cage wire hoops) to hold the developing flower stems and buds upright. Once done — enjoy the outstanding colors and fragrances of your Peonies.

Most larger garden centers will offer a few newer varieties, either as potted plants or bare-rooted, 3 to 5 growth “eyes” rhizomes. Online specialty nurseries will offer older heirloom varieties.



The other classification of these plants is called **Tree Peonies** (*Paeonia* × *suffruticosa*.)

Okay, the name is not what it appears to be. They are not growing as tall as Oaks (that would be amazing) but develop above the ground with woody rhizomes. When raised in prime conditions, these peonies can grow to nearly five feet tall in over ten years! When planting these types of Peonies, remember not to cut-back or damage these wooden structures.

To the untrained eye, Tree Peonies will look the same as Herbaceous Peonies but will have larger flowers on substantially taller plants. They are also more expensive.

For new gardeners, I recommend purchasing the Herbaceous varieties first to experience their delightful blossoms, and to understand how these plants grow and develop.

Phlox – Garden Phlox and Creeping Phlox



Phlox paniculata and *Phlox subulata* – The Garden Phlox is a large and diverse group of plants. Professional landscapers consider them as “the backbone of a perennial garden” for their hardiness, long-blooming, and very colorful flower displays. One feature not noted is their fragrance. I guess that’s not a high priority. They have an aroma that resembles peanut butter, almonds, or some other warm, nutty scent.

They need plenty of sunlight, fertile soil, and good drainage to grow well. Plant height, on average, is above three feet tall. They bloom midsummer to fall and are hardy from zones 3 to 9.

No matter which variety you may grow, make sure it is “mildew resistant.” Older Phlox varieties always developed powdery mildew disease on their leaves by late summer, and they then look ghastly.

There are many recommended newer varieties to grow. Search for the type called **David** (shown above) for it represents the best white garden phlox and possibly THE BEST Garden Phlox — period. It has large, pure white flowers that are also highly fragrant of almonds or peanuts (in my nasal opinion).

This variety has excellent mildew disease resistance, so you do not have to spray chemicals on the leaves. It blooms mid to late summer and is excellent for an evening fragrance garden. Many landscapers feel this phlox is the best one to grow — and I agree with them!



Another easy-to-grow and very low maintenance Phlox is an evergreen groundcover. **Creeping Phlox** (*Phlox subulata*) is slow-growing, but when planted in quantity, it will fill in an area faster.

Hardy from zones 2 to 9, this plant forms ground-hugging, deep green, spruce needle-like leafy mats. By early to mid-spring, the colorful blossoms provide a show (and traffic) stopping extravaganza display. This species blooms in spring with a carpet of white, vivid rose-pink, pale pink, or pale-lavender blue petals. A variety or two has bi-color petals of pink and white.

By late spring, the show ends, and for the remaining growing season, only a green mat of leaves remains. But that is not a bad thing, for all gardens need hardy groundcovers. This plant (and *Sedum*, described shortly) performs perfectly well filling in a bed.

Other than the occasional watering and light-fertilizing, this plant is a welcomed carefree addition to any first-time gardener's garden. It grows best in as much sunlight as possible, and with well-drained, fertile soil. It can tolerate some dry soil but appreciates the occasional refreshing drink of water. Well, don't we all?

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, you need to 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. Breed from wild-stock of North American prairie heritage, these plants can tolerate heat, dry soil conditions, and your occasional neglect.

They can suffer from extended periods of wet, soggy soil, so make sure 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 they can be a short-lived perennial. The blossoms can produce a tremendous amount of seed, which weakens the plant and may not survive a winter. The upside is 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 extensively grown varieties available is **Goldsturm**, having brilliant yellow petals with a dark brown to black central cone — the “black-eye.” It grows to over two feet tall, is bushy, producing boat-loads 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 to remain. 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 free-flowering varieties available to gardeners. *Rudbeckia hirta* has gorgeous mixed-color orange, red, and yellow flowers. It is also a carefree addition for a bed or border.

Many garden centers will offer these plants and several other spectacular varieties.

Sedum – Stonecrop



Sedum spectabile; *Sedum ternatum* or *Sedum acre* – Some perennials are never acknowledged as being “the most popular plant” to grow in gardens. Sedum is a textbook example of this misguided appraisal. They are one of the most carefree of garden and landscaping plants. Once planted, they usually thrive (and multiply) without too much help — but would appreciate some attention and admiration now and then. Who doesn’t?

One reason for this apathy is people consider them boring for not having vibrantly colorful flowers, or they bloom in the fall.

These are poor excuses, for all *Sedum* species and varieties have excellent qualities for growing in all gardens. They tolerate full sun and dry soil by having succulent leaves so you do not have to water often.

This is ideal when planting in sandy or gravelly soil and exposed to dry locations.

There is an old joke about why they have the common name of “stonecrop.” The punchline is they live longer and need less care than stones and rocks. (*Insert drum rimshot and cymbal “ba-dum-ching” sound here.*) There is only one precaution to keep in mind when growing all Sedum, and it is to never plant them in consistently moist, or wet soil for the stems will rot.

The succulent leaves can exhibit beautiful colors, including variegations. Most varieties display shades of dark purple, reddish-orange (or a dull copper,) golden yellow, and green blended with white or yellow. Depending on the species and type, a plant will have clusters of star-shaped rose-pink, white or yellow flowers.

Now, let’s get to the vital aspect of what type of Sedum to grow in your garden. It depends on how you want to display them.

There are two classifications of Sedum plants. You can choose upright growth or relaxed or sprawling varieties. The upright growers (such as *Sedum spectabile* ‘**Autumn Delight**’) have larger succulent leaves on one to three-foot stems.



In contrast, as expected, the creeping or groundcover types (such as *Sedum ternatum* or *Sedum acre* – shown above) typically have small leaves that can cover pathways, or as an under-planting in rock gardens.

The star-shaped flowers of the tall-grower flowers appear as large, separate clusters while the groundcovers blanket themselves with small blossoms.

The time of blooming is also different. The upright varieties, like **Autumn Joy**, bloom spectacularly in the late summer through the fall. In contrast, the lax-growers typically bloom from spring to early summer, but their flowers are less showy. The main attraction with these groundcovers is their colorful leaves.

One benefit of these succulent plants is you can quickly propagate them. The groundcovers root along the ground where the stems touch the soil. Cutting the upright grower's stems, you can insert them into

the soil at any similar location. Here, they will quickly form new roots. How easy is that? You can have Sedum growing all over the garden!

Stokesia – Stokes Aster or Cornflower Aster



Stokesia laevis – This hardy perennial should be a popular plant in any garden. If you find potted plants at your nearby nursery, purchase, at least, a few of them. The plant has beautiful four-inch, purple-blue daisy-like flowers for most of the summer.

Named for English physician and botanist, Jonathan Stokes (1755-1831), it is a native wildflower in the southeastern parts of the United States. Mother Nature decided this would be the only species, for it has no other close relatives.

Hardy from zones 5 to 10, it grows well in full to partial sunlight in many soil types but requires well-drained conditions, especially in the

winter. Consistently wet or ice-covered soil will kill it, so make sure the soil is porous.

Nurseries and garden centers may offer this plant, but it is questionable. You can purchase seeds from online seed companies, but I recommend buying specific varieties. Make sure you search for and grow the type called **Peachie's Pick**. This plant displays shorter sized plants (two feet tall) with more substantial, upright facing, deeper blue flowers. This plant's 'icing-on-the-cake' most valuable trait is that the flowers are sterile. Wild grown plants self-seeds with abandon, but *Peachie's Pick* does not. This is ideal for it saves valuable energy to produce longer blooming and offer extra hardiness.

Another variety to find is **Honeysong Purple** having deeper purple flowers with shorter growing stems.

Stokesia provides plenty of cut-flowers over the summer and enticing nectar for several butterfly species, especially swallowtails.

I hope these delightful varieties will entice you into growing several in your garden. Who can pass up having a brag-about-plant with gorgeous blue flowers and being low-maintenance in a garden? Not me — or you!

Tiareella – Foam Flowers



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

Tiarella cordifolia – Tiarellas (possibly pronounced ‘TEE-uh-rell-uhz’ for those of you, like me, who professionally butcher Latin names) is native from eastern to mid-western North America. Many gardeners may not be familiar with this very hardy (zones 4 to 9) and colorful perennial which resembles *Heuchera* and *Heucherella* (both described earlier).

This plant has emerged as being increasingly popular for home landscaping — especially for being low-maintenance, and thriving in those challenging shady areas. Finally, something to break the Impatiens monopoly on shadowy land!

Make sure to always plant these plants in moist but well-drained, fertile, high humus-based soil for best growth, leaf development and blooming potential.

With thick, deep-green leaves heavily mottled of bronze or black markings, this plant can tolerate more or denser shade than *Heuchera* and *Heucherella* plants plus it will grow better in hot climates. These leaves remain evergreen for most of the year — including the coldest of winters. In some varieties, the foliage turns a deeper bronze-red in the winter which looks outstanding against a light covering of snow. Ha! Top that Impatiens! Plant these perennials along with Hostas to enjoy their complementary appearances.

The other reason for Tiarellas growing popularity are the bottle-brush flower spikes containing hundreds of small, lightly scented, bright white and pink blossoms. It is these flowers that stand out like sea foam (thus the nickname) in the shade. They bloom heavily, sometimes covering the foliage, in mid-spring for several weeks and then off-and-on until late fall. These flowers are lightly lily-scented, but I have a difficult time detecting it.

Breeders develop each year newer (and more colorful) varieties — just like the *Heuchera* plants — and it may prove difficult for you to decide which type to plant.

You should be able to find these plants from larger garden centers and online nurseries.

Low-Maintenance Colorful Bulbs

All gardens should include plants that form bulbs and corms (think of them as energy storage batteries). They are also perennial; able to grow and bloom each year.

For the sake of our sanity, let's not dwell on what differentiates a bulb from a corm. They act alike, so let's concentrate on what to plant in your garden. Many of these plants are famous for spring-time blooming but need planting (or insertion) into the ground in autumn. Other bulbs, like Lilies, should be planted in the fall or spring.

For new-gardeners, the only labor needed is to plant these bulbs. Most need inserting several inches beneath the soil surface to prevent them from freezing during the winter. The ground will need adequate tilling with added humus and high-phosphorus fertilizer (or bone meal). Once tucked into the ground, the next complicated process is to wait until spring to enjoy the colorful flowers.

Inserting the bulbs in the ground creates different trains of thought. Many gardeners advise planting similar bulbs in groups. They look better when blooming instead of single plantings, which look rather lonely. Some gardeners like geometrical plantings, while others prefer the "fling to the ground" method and insert the bulbs where they fall. This is the "natural-looking" idea since Mama Nature dislikes a prim-and-proper, and neat-and-tidy concept.

Don't take this causal idea too far. When planting different bulbs, don't intermix them if they all bloom at the same time. This Hodge-Podge of mixed species of bulbs will look embarrassing amateurish — you want to look like a professional gardener.

All garden centers and nurseries offer many types and colors of varieties each fall, but they may not be the best ones available. Purchase the following bulbs from online specialty nurseries for the healthiest and most-colorful types. Never purchase (or plant) fall-planting bulbs late in the winter or spring — they will not survive or bloom.

So, what bulbs can you plant in your spectacular carefree garden? Let's begin with...

Crocus



Crocus vernus; *Crocus chrysanthus*; and *Crocus flavus* – This spring blooming member of the Iris family is a necessity for all gardens. Although its stunningly beautiful blossoms may bloom for a week, it represents a much-needed affirmation that Spring has finally arrived. Think of Crocus as the prelude or opening act to spring.

Two representative species, **Dutch** or **Giant Crocus** (*Crocus vernus* and *Crocus flavus*), are the popular species and varieties sold by nurseries in autumn.

One other species, *Crocus chrysanthus* or **Snow Crocus**, is lesser-known. It is the earliest blooming species, even when snow is still on the ground. Why it's not more well-known or popular is questionable.

Most garden centers will have bags of these corms — usually sold as mixed colors. Specialty nurseries also offer separate colors. Insert the corms four to six inches in the ground, cover them up and add an inch of mulch, and then wait. Yes, wait all those miserably dark, cloudy, chilled to-the-bone days until they begin to sprout in early spring.

Make sure your croci (*or is the plural called "crocuses"?*) grow in full to partial sunlight. They grow and bloom well long before other perennials emerge from the ground.

You can naturalize them in your lawn but never mow the grass for over a month until their leaves turn brown. Mowing too early will prevent them from blooming next year. My recommendation is to plant them only in a flower bed or border and leave them alone!

These bulbs (they are corms actually, but don't lose sleep over it) are hardy from zones 3 to 8. There is no excuse for not planting several bags of these delightful plants.

Hyacinthus – Hyacinth



Hyacinthus orientalis – In most garden centers during the fall, you will come across these large, round, purplish, or off-white bulbs. They are the popular **Dutch Hyacinths**. There are several varieties with many colors, but they all have a heady, sweet perfume.

Being large bulbs, they are easy to plant, and you are correct in assuming they will sprout big blossoms in the spring. Well, you are half-right, for they erupt into a thick spike of small florets.

Most Hyacinth bulbs are hardy from zones 4 to 8. You need to insert them about six inches deep into the ground. The addition of mulch adds better protection against freezing during the winter. I must advise wearing gloves when handling these bulbs since they can cause mild skin irritations or allergic reactions.

The first spring, when these bulbs bloom, the flower spikes are in fine form. But, in subsequent years following, they become disappointingly small. Because of this subpar observation, I recommend spending your time, labor, and money on the other bulbs listed in this section, which increase in floral enjoyment over the years.

Lilium – Asiatic Lily



Lilium asiatica – Being a true lily, **Asiatic lilies** (*Lilium asiatica*) provide the earliest of the lily species to bloom in your garden. Most varieties flower from early to late summer. Although not fragrant, they advertise themselves with the startling “hot” colors of white, red, yellow, or orange petals.

This is a Lily where once you plant its bulb, you can allow it to grow and develop without your constant attention. It is low growing with the flowers looking up to you like other garden perennials.

A sister species, *Lilium orientalis*, or the **Oriental Lily** and its many hybrids can also be a low-care lily. It grows taller, and gardeners usually have to secure tall wooden stakes to the stems to prevent wind from

snapping them off. Their magnificent, colorful, highly scented, large, dangling blossoms are impressive, but they need more attention.

I feel they also distract the overall look of a garden with their tall stems and flowers. If blended in with other taller perennials, they, and the garden, will look more attractive. Well, that's my two cents worth of garden design advice.

Lycoris – Naked Ladies



Lycoris squamigera – All right, gentlemen. Calm down. It's not what you think. However, you can have fun with your friends by saying, "Come on over to see the naked ladies in my garden!" Won't they be surprised!

This nickname is one of the several common names for this bulb. The other names are **Surprise Lily**, **Magic Lily**, and **Resurrection Lily**. Growers give them these nicknames because the flower stalks grow out of the ground in late summer before the leaves develop. Yes, you read that correctly; they bloom — in late summer — before the leaves emerge.

It may surprise you to see them blooming since the stems blend in well with other plants. The bulbs bloom for nearly three weeks. After that,

they form seeds, then die back to the ground. Here today — gone tomorrow. About a week or two later, the leaves will emerge and grow. They stay this way over the fall and winter.

By late spring, they die back, and the bulbs go dormant until late-summer. Then the cycle begins again. These plants must be from an alternate universe!

The bulbs are hardy from zones 4 to 11 and love to grow in full to partial sunlight and in well-drained soil.

It is important not to disturb these bulbs. Plant and forget about them except for the occasional fertilizing and watering when they are growing. Whatever you do — don't dig them up or transplant them! Now that is a carefree garden plant!

Narcissus – Daffodils



Something is alluring about these flowers that make people stop in their tracks to admire them. Other than Tulips, this large group of bulbs screams, “spring is definitely here!” Their beauty also inspired William Wordsworth to compose a poem when he saw a host of these golden blossoms swaying in a breeze.

I, too, am swayed by the hypnotic appeal of these flowers — especially the bright yellow trumpet-like petals of **King Alfred** or **Dutch Masters** varieties.

There is a vast assortment of daffodils (and the smaller-flowered varieties called Narcissus) available every fall in garden centers and online. As with all members of the Narcissus family, autumn is the time to plant these bulbs.

For the best selection of these bulbs, go to the extra trouble to order them from specialty nurseries, usually based in Holland. You can select better quality bulbs (including Tulips and others), which will provide better growth and blooming. Local garden centers are fine, but they usually offer lesser-grade stock. They may not always be “true-to-name” of the varieties you wish to grow.

Make sure you plant all Narcissus bulbs about six inches deep in areas having full to partial sunlight, and in well-drained, fertile soil. They are also outstanding for naturalizing in lawns and woodlands.

Once inserted into the earth, you do not have to do anything more with them except to prevent mowing off the leaves. Never cut-off the grass-like leaves until they turn brown. I know that will look tacky, but it is vital so they can re-energize themselves via photosynthesis to remain healthy, and to form more bulbs and flowers for future springtime pleasure.

Tulipa – Tulip



Various *Tulipa* species and hybrids – Last, but never least, these are probably the most cherished and popular of spring-blooming bulbs.

Tulips originated in the Middle East and became a must-have item. Poets and artists praised their simple charm and beauty. If television were around then, HGTV would sell plenty of them.

In western Europe, this fascination became a status symbol of addiction. Wealthy people purchased tulips to impress their friends. Those friends had to impress their friends and so on down the line.

This craze hit its peak in a period around 1634 to 1637 in Holland. It became known as the age of Tulipmania. It was something like the California Gold Rush but, instead of gold fever, people got tulip fever. They wanted to grow, invest, sell, buy, cheat, and steal tulip bulbs.

Several people sold their houses to afford one or two bulbs! They quickly made fortunes which they eventually lost when reasonable people asked, *“Are we crazy? Wake up, people!”*

Tulipmania ended, and tulips became ordinary spring-blooming flowers. A few enterprising people in Holland knew they were still a good thing and continued to grow and sell them. Today, selling tulips and other spring-blooming bulbs (as fall purchased bulbs and as florist bouquets), is a multi-billion-dollar industry. Who knew such a beautiful flower could cause such historical excitement?

As with all the other spring-flowering bulbs, plant tulips in the fall. They prefer as much sunlight as possible, and — now, this is very important — well-drained, sandy, or gravel-based soil. Tulips hate constant moist or wet soil. When they go dormant in the summer, the underground bulbs prefer to be as dry as possible. They love drought conditions!

Case in point: On the south side of my house, the soil is excessively gravelly. Several years ago, without knowing my above warning, planted a line of red and yellow **Darwin Hybrid** tulip bulbs along the side of the house. I thought, *“OK. They will bloom well in the spring, but that will be it. They will probably not survive in this inhospitable dry area.”* Well, various people have known me to make a mistake or two, but these tulips fooled me. Each spring, they bloom surprisingly well.

There is a galaxy of different varieties and colors (except a true-blue), ranging from early to late bloomers. You can never go wrong with the old standbys of bright red or yellow-flowered types.

You can select better quality bulbs, which will provide better growth and blooming if you order them in the fall from specialty Holland-based nurseries. Local garden centers are fine, but they usually offer lesser-grade stock.

Like the daffodils, tulips die back naturally by early summer, so don't be in a hurry to cut off the stems and leaves. Leave them alone and wait until next spring to enjoy them once again.

Sow and Watch Them Grow Annuals

Annual flowering plants live life in the fast lane. It sounds sad, for unlike the bulbs and perennials, annuals survive for only one growing season. They bloom-like-crazy over the summer, self-seed-like-crazy by fall, and then die by a killing frost or by exhaustion. This, to a new gardener, can be ideal, but can also be a curse, for each spring hordes of new plants litter the beds and borders. Here, all gardeners eventually learn to weed them out. But do we have to?

For any low-maintenance garden, the answer can be “no.” Whatever annual that can self-seed itself and re-grow the following year with no input or help can be a win-win situation. The only work involved is from the start — preparing the bed or border to scatter seeds, rake or scratch them into the soil, water, and then wait for the new plants to grow and bloom.

The following annual plants are easy to sow in a garden. While the above perennials and bulbs highlight spectacular blooms for a few short weeks of spring or summer, these annuals add well-needed color all summer long.

The best part of the plan is to prepare the bed soil, scatter some seeds, lightly cover them with fine-tilled soil, water the spot, and then wait. What could be easier to make your new garden a wonder of the neighborhood? Well, having someone else do it, but that would make it “their” garden and not yours.

Can I give you one large heaping portion of advice before beginning to showcase these carefree plants? I recommend not to apply mulch to your garden beds or borders. Instead, cover the ground with pea-size gravel.

I grew many flowers by sprinkling the seed on the gravel and letting the rain or your water sprinkler settle them in between the stones. Here, the seeds can sift downward between the rocky grains, and they will

eventually germinate. I even had good luck sowing tiny petunia seeds using this method.

The reason I'm not too fond of the popular method of applying bark or leaf mulch is it can dry out too fast on the surface. It also harbors slugs and other creepy-crawlies within the rotting matter, ready to eat your prized plants.

Pea-sized gravel also helps control weeds, for it is easier to pull or hoe them out of the soil.

Calendula – Pot Marigold



Calendula officinalis – The common name of Marigold is confusing since gardeners also call another, but an unrelated flower, the Marigold (technically called *Tagetes*), which we will review in a moment.

Calendula is a member of the enormous daisy family and produces easy to sow and grow seeds in any flower bed. They are large enough to handle and look different from most other flower seeds. There are many varieties, and the flower colors range from bright yellows and vibrant oranges to mixed shades.

The flowers make excellent cut flowers for the house and are edible (caution: some people may be allergic.) The petals add vivid color to salads, rice dishes, soups, and stews. This culinary usage explains the common nickname of Pot Marigold.

Craft folks also use them as a dye to add coloring to fabrics and as an application to skin lotions. I guess the central question is, what can't this annual do?

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 the occasional clipping off of old flowers helps prevent excessive seed production and will produce more flowers during the summer. They need plenty of sunlight and well-drained soil to grow well.

Overall, this is an excellent plant for children (and us child-like adults) to learn how to sow seeds and care for them. It also teaches us that flowers can provide other purposes instead of only being pretty.

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

Centaurea – Bachelor's Buttons



Centaurea cyanus – Gardeners have always considered this a cottage garden favorite for its intense blue flowers. However, it has not been ideal for farmers, for 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, for it is effortless to sow and grow in any garden. Cornflowers make beautiful cut flowers, for they can last a long time in a vase of water. They can have single to double petals, and the colors range from the intense blue to purple, pink, and white.

This flower reminds me of the old Hans Christian Andersen tale of the ugly duckling turning into a beautiful swan. No one liked this flower, but

over time people eventually accepted it, possibly for that stunning blue color.

It once became a fashion accessory for men. Its other common name is Bachelor's Buttons, associated with the insertion of a flower or a small bouquet into the buttonholes of jackets or coats. That was a fashion statement from years ago and now considered "nerdy" or "effeminate" by today's standards.

This flower is terrific for picking, and that amazing blue color is so darn 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.

Cosmidium



Cosmidium burridgeanum – This is one of the new annual kids on the block, and not much information is available about it for most gardeners. How about you getting acquainted with this dynamo of a grower and a powerhouse of a bloomer?

This plant is a native Texas wildflower and has 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 with purple-red-brown centered Cosmos-like blossoms. I will type more about Cosmos in the next section.

Cosmidium has an unprecedented strong aroma of chocolate or cocoa. 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 all adult chocoholics. It is ideal for increasing in-mass for bedding, rock gardens, and containers.

The plant produces so many flowers for the summer it will wear itself out, especially while forming new seeds. For a little proactive maintenance, take the time to 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 of them is more attractive and provides more of that chocolatey perfume for the garden.

Look for the variety called **Philippine** in published or online seed catalogs. It grows shorter and bushier than the typical species plant. You will not find this plant in garden centers, either as potted plants or in seed racks. It is “new” to the gardening public, and it takes time to catch-up in becoming famous.

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 with ones to grow in your gardens. I don't know where to begin, but will give you a general idea of what to expect.

As a relative in the immense daisy family, botanists say Cosmos is “ridiculously easy” to grow in any garden. If they were currency, your investment of 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 — perfect for cutting and picking — held high above the attractive fern 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 add bonus points on being ideal annuals for a no-to-low care garden, these plants can easily tolerate general neglect, such as less watering and thriving in less fertile ground. 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, orange, and many bicolors with contrasting or alternating striped petals.

There are two species (with several varieties) of *Cosmos* you can include in your garden. *Cosmos sulphureus* is native to North America, and as the Latin name shows, 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 welcomed 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 is *Cosmos bipinnatus* (shown above) has a more magnificent display of floral colors mentioned earlier. The hybrid varieties in this species grow a modest two to four feet tall, but branch out to fill in an area quickly. 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 all the butterflies, bees, and hummingbirds (if you live in North America) in the neighborhood. Sit back in your most comfortable lawn chair and enjoy all those colorful wings and petals.

Your local garden center will have packets of seeds available for you to purchase. For more colorful varieties, purchase from online seed

nurseries.

Eschscholzia – California Poppy, Golden Poppy



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

Eschscholzia californica – If you are a self-proclaimed lazy gardener (and I mean this in a positive light given many people lead hectic and busy lives), this gorgeous annual is perfect for your flower garden. It is one of the best sow-on-the-ground flowers. Then, you wait for a few weeks until petals unfurl, blanketing the bed or border with brilliant golden yellow, orange, red, and eye-catching pink.

As a member of the Poppy family, this plant is native to the arid areas of far-western USA — notably California, no great surprise — and Mexico.

The foliage has finely divided or feathery blue-green leaves topped with the single to semi-double blossoms. The height of this bushy plant can be, on average, a foot tall but if taller, will flop over. This is of no concern, for new shoots always produces more flowers. The only “problem” is the petals close up at night and during cool, cloudy, and rainy days.

They grow best in sunny beds and borders with well-drained soil, but, unlike most other garden flowers, prefer less-fertile conditions. If excessively fertilized, you can expect more stems and leaves and a few flowers. Try to find a less than ideal area by your home and scatter the seeds. They will amaze you by how they will increase by excessive flowering and with new self-sown seeds for the following year.

There are several varieties or strains of these plants. You can easily find the species in garden center seed racks, including a brilliant red form called **Red Chief**. Online nurseries offer more of a selection, including types with pastel and ruffled petals.

Helianthus – Sunflower



Helianthus species and hybrids – Unless you have recently emigrated from Venus or Mars, Sunflowers do not need too much of an explanation. In fact, this was possibly the first flower that amazed you as a child. Well, the amazement continues for today's varieties now compete to outshine the tall, but still reliable, old-fashion yellow sunflowers.

Helianthus species have had a long history with Man. The seeds are protein-rich food and compressed for making cooking oil. Their flowers later become notable just for the enjoyment of their beauty. All varieties grown today came from the perennial species native to North America but transformed into annuals.

We are all familiar with the large seed-heads of massive, tall plants nodding over by the side of vegetable or flower gardens. Over recent years, interest in wildly colorful sunflowers has gained a “cult following.”

By advances in genetics, new pollen-less varieties have emerged on the gardening scene. Breeders develop them to tap into the cut-flower market. The common bright yellow sunflowers drop notable amounts of pollen onto shiny, Pledge® - covered tables. Sort of messy, but the new pollen-less types prevent constant clean up.

Flower color has also taken an enormous leap in creating many earth-shades — from classic yellow to white, orange, red, garnet-red to an almost black. I can't even describe all the variations of colors also created!

For any carefree garden, what could be simpler than punching a small hole into the soil with your index finger, drop in a large seed and cover it? It's so simple, a small child can learn how to do it. Teaching a child how to garden (for a lifetime) can begin with this simple lesson.

All garden centers will offer packets of these flowers, including several unusual varieties based on size, flower color, and if the plant produces one or several flowers per stalk.

Ipomoea – Morning-glories



Ipomoea tricolor*; *Ipomoea purpurea*, *Ipomoea hederacea*, and *Ipomoea nil – Let's see...how am I going to explain all the different Morning-glories without writing several volumes of ebooks? The sheer size of varieties and species (over 500 worldwide) appears to be a favorite creation by flower designer Mother Nature.

Most of the species sport a similar tubular or funnel-like floral structure. For any variation in color and size, there is a representative vine. One standard feature they share in common is they are all tropical plants. Yes, not one hardy floral-soul in the whole group. As long as they experience a warm, moist spot to set down roots, they are happy to grow as annuals. If you are a plant and have a limited time to live, you better grow fast and bloom furiously to form seeds of many future generations as possible.

I must point out Morning-glories is a consortium of three species rolled into one. The older Latin names are *Ipomoea purpurea*, *Ipomoea hederacea*, and *Ipomoea nil*. The common Morning-glory has different leaf appearances, but the colorful funnel-shaped flowers look similar.

These species have evolved many varieties over the years, with colors confined to the blue-purple, pastel reddish-pink, and white shades. Most of the flowers show a white center, along with a whitish or darker color star pattern in the petals.

They are all impressive, and easy-to-grow vines for any new gardener to grow.

Their seeds are relatively large (easy enough to handle) but are very hard. They need soaking in water overnight to soften the seed coats for them to germinate. You can sow the seeds in small pots a few weeks before planting them outside (after the last forecasted frost date).

You can also sow the seeds outdoors in a sunny, well-drained area. Don't worry about soil fertility, for too much fertilizer will produce more leaves and stems than flowers. Since they are vines, they will need a supporting structure, like a trellis or fence — or even tall bamboo poles — for them to wrap their climbing tendrils around.

All morning-glories love the heat of the summer. They prefer warm growing conditions, both in the air and soil temperatures. Gardeners can have difficulties raising the young vines if they grow them in chilly weather and soil.

By mid-summer, 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 for sure, but it may apply to early morning pollinating insects.

Your only major problem is in deciding which varieties to grow.

Garden centers and nurseries offer them for sale as starter plants before they vine out too much. To get the color or specific variety you

wish to grow, sow, and grow them yourself by seed.

So, what should you grow? There are so many varieties to choose from, but check the selections offered by many seed catalogs and online nurseries. If possible, obtain seeds of the unusual **Japanese Morning-glory** types (*Ipomoea nil*). They produced unique and colorful flowers to amaze you and your friends.

Mirabilis – Four O'Clock or Marvel of Peru



Mirabilis jalapa – To be specific, this is a 4:00 pm plant, but if you are awake at 4:00 am, they should still be in bloom. You would need a flashlight or torch to see them. Who needs a good night's sleep, anyway?

The Latin name means “marvelous,” referring to their floral beauty. That word alone describes one reason for them to be in your flower bed. The colorful flowers stay closed for most of the day until late afternoon. If they are growing in partial shade, they may open before four o'clock.

The other common name for these fragrant flowers is Marvel of Peru, for they are native to this area of South America. The flowers can be

your basic solid white, pink, red, and yellow. There is a multi-colored variety called the **Broken Colors Series** (shown above), having stripes, splashes, smears, spots, and blemishes of different colors on the same flower.

Easy to grow from seed (either indoors or outside), it enjoys growing in as much sunlight as possible and in well-drained, fertile soil. By late summer, the plants can become bushy and covered with hundreds of aromatic blossoms each evening.

Mirabilis can be perennial in more temperate locations (zones 7 to 10 if protected from wet winter soil) and re-grow from a thick, woody taproot or tuber.

Even in the northern areas, you can carefully dig up these tubers, after a killing frost, and store them for the winter like you would for Dahlias. This root will re-grow in your garden, and next summer's plants will become HUGE and covered with thousands of sweetly scented blossoms! You don't have to do this, for it's easy to sow the seeds (like sunflowers) each year.

Seeds are plentiful to find in many seed catalogs and in garden centers.

Papaver – Poppy



Papaver rhoeas; *Papaver somniferum*; *Papaver nudicaule* – All low-maintenance gardens need to include this large group of plants. Most species and varieties can act as annuals or biennials if you can sow their tiny seeds on the ground in the early spring. Other authorities suggest sowing them in late summer or early autumn. Almost all develop better if you scatter the seed on the soil and not cover them.

Let's begin with a common, but delightful species, with a long history of cultivation, not specifically for horticultural reasons but as a weed in agriculture crops.

This poppy is *Papaver rhoeas* — commonly called the **Corn Poppy**. Once considered a nuisance agricultural weed, today, these poppies spread via escaped seed from garden plantings or intentionally sowed

for roadside plantings for beautification. I plead guilty to allowing this to happen near my home. I tried to “dress-up” a boring grassy roadside by self-sowing many cheap seed packets of this poppy. It worked well; motorists would slow down and admire a long ribbon of scarlet blossoms waving in the breeze.

Nothing can compare to this eye-catching historical plant. As an annual or biennial, its small seeds can live for years, waiting for the soil to become disturbed. When so, either by a plow, or a spade, the seeds germinate, then quickly grow and bloom into vibrant red flowers.

They bloom from spring to late summer, depending on your location and climate. Native to southern Europe, especially around the Mediterranean areas.

Historically, the red petals became a memorable symbol of the tragedies of war. Colonel John McCrae, a Canadian surgeon with Canada’s First Brigade Artillery, composed a famous poem in 1915 describing the horrific results of a World War I battle. Called, “*In Flanders Fields*,” he traumatically described the rows of soldiers’ graves highlighted in a sea of grass by these red poppies.

If you feel the need to sow and grow a low maintenance weed in your flower gardens — let it be this memorable and glorious flower. It is a commonly grown poppy. I love how it will pop-up here-and-there in a garden every spring from its self-sown seed.

These poppies are not always bright red. In 1880, the Reverend William Wilks of Shirley, England (a suburb of London) discovered one or more of his red poppies had different shades of color. Being a good gardener, he saved seeds of his variations over the years and planted them. He built up a line of different colors, and they became known as the **Shirley Poppy**. These plants now have vivid yellow, pink, orange, and even white variations.

Another candidate for the honor of being a carefree poppy is *Papaver nudicaule* or the **Iceland Poppy**. While the above Poppies are annual, this species takes honors as being a perennial — with a few caveats.

This species is temperamental, being ‘somewhat’ challenging to raise and grow. It can be slow-growing, so have patience when the seedlings grow in your garden.

Native to the far northern regions of North America and Asia, this poppy loves colder climates and soil. It’s hardy from zones 3 to 5 (as a perennial), but in warmer locations, it will be annual or biennial. Don’t worry about it — sow the seeds outdoors in a sunny area of the garden in the fall. Then cross your fingers for late spring and early summer flowers. Please remember, the seedlings do not transplant well because of having long taproots.

The crepe paper-like petals have bright colors ranging from red, yellow, orange, pink, and white with bicolors galore.

One other entertaining poppy is a perennial but also treated as an annual, for it will bloom quickly from seed sown in the spring. It is *Papaver somniferum*, known as the **Opium Poppy** or **Bread Seed Poppy**. You may think you are about to embark on a clandestine operation as an opium gardener, but fear not, these are not the “high-octane” plants grown in some areas of the world. Most of these poppy varieties produce little significant amounts of latex to form opium.

The species Latin name means ‘to bring on sleep,’ since we derive the drug morphine from the plant, but the fantastic color of their flowers will keep you wide-eyed awake. Many single to double-flowered varieties (several with blossoms up to four to five inches in diameter) are available in shades of white, red, pink, purple, and stunning bicolors. They self-seed a-plenty, and bloom from early to mid-summer.

You can never go wrong in having all the poppies mentioned here growing in your garden. You can find these seeds in many seed catalogs and in garden centers.

Unless you cut off the developing seed capsules of all these poppies, a multitude of seedlings will emerge next spring from them self-seeding the ground. For an overworked and newbie gardener, this is not a bad thing. Enjoy all those colorful blossoms!

Portulaca – Moss Rose



Portulaca grandiflora – Let's say your garden soil is sunbaked, sandy, gravelly, or is chunky with stones. 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 non-stop 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 for their survival in those inhospitable, hot, dry places. Now, this does not mean they can behave like cactus plants, for they need occasional watering, but you can save on your water bill growing these gorgeous plants.

One thing they detest to grow in is heavy-clay based soil, for clay can retain water too long and can rot the roots and stems. If your soil is mainly clay, take the time (and yes, some work) to add plenty of coarse sand. Come to think of it — this would be good to do when planting all 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, but the flowers appear as single to semi-double petal roses. Their colors range from white, red, rose-pink, orange, yellow, and a slew of bicolors with streaks and stripes. They will bloom all summer and into the fall, and will self-seed a-plenty, so expect new plants each year.

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

Each summer, I will drive by a home with a long driveway having separate entrance and exit ways. 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 other flowers.

Tagetes – Marigolds



Tagetes patula and *Tagetes erecta* – Long-time experienced gardeners will roll their eyes by reacting to my decision to include these annuals. Any newbie gardener will be glad to add them to a low-maintenance garden.

Marigolds are one of the easiest of annual flowers to grow and raise — especially for children and us child-like adults. Many times, garden centers, nurseries, and garden shows will often give out small potted plants to children as welcome gifts or door prizes.

The large-flowered varieties are the tall **African Marigolds** (*Tagetes erecta*.) The smaller-flowered ones are the shorter-growing **French Marigolds** (*Tagetes patula*.) The strange thing is all these plants are native to Mexico — go figure!

Most varieties will become bushy and bloom all summer with colors ranging from red to orange, gold, yellow, bicolors, tricolors, and off-white.

Okay, everything seems to be fine-and-dandy with excellent reasons to grow these plants. So, let's get to the significant 'deal-breaker' why experienced gardeners prefer not to raise them in their garden.

Marigold leaves and stems always have a peculiar herbal odor that many adults find offensive. The plants only smell when handling or touching the leaves. As a former nurseryman, I noticed it was the adults that complained.

I grew hundreds of gorgeous Marigolds in my greenhouse, and each year had to endure the complaints of customers about "those horribly smelly flowers." There were times I wished to say, "*Well, you plant them and then wash your hands. You don't lie in the flower bed with them!*" I never said those words — thought about it many times — but I only smiled. Children, though, were more interested in the beautiful, colorful flowers. They rarely, if ever, complained of the odor. God bless the beasts and the children.

If you are a new gardener, fear not; you do not have to handle the plants or even purchase them. Decide if you wish to grow the tall African or the shorter growing French varieties. In a border, the African varieties can be in the background while the French types highlight the foreground areas. Lightly till the garden or flower bed and scatter some seeds over the soil and carefully rake them in. Then let them alone. By summer, and well into fall, you will be rich in floral splendor.

You can purchase seed packets in any garden center, and they usually are cheap — so don't act frugal — sow plenty of them. Online seed companies will also have more unusual colors and blends but are pricier and offer fewer seeds.

All Marigolds prefer plenty of sunlight and well-drained soil. Any consistently wet ground will rot the roots and stems. They can tolerate less-than fertile soil, but giving them 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.

Tithonia – Mexican Sunflower



Tithonia rotundifolia – Unlike most relatives of sunflowers, this eye-catching annual plant only grows to an average of five feet tall and has vibrant, orange-red daisy-like flowers. The plants are bushy, and there will be many blossoms to enjoy from summer to fall.

Tithonia is native to Mexico and also grows wild in Central America. It is easy to grow from seed and raise in any garden.

Being a relative of the sunflower, it loves to grow in full sunlight and tolerates less fertile, drier soil. It is one of the most drought tolerant tall-growing flowers you can grow in a garden. You don't have to worry about watering it if you are away for an extended period of time.

The seeds are large enough to handle and so simple to insert into the well-drained soil.

The variety called **Torch** is available as seed from many catalogs and garden centers. It is perfect for children's gardens since it grows less tall, is bushy, and is the favorite hangout for all the neighborhood butterflies and hummingbirds.

You and your children or grandchildren should sit in lawn chairs and watch the birds and butterflies flutter all around this plant. This would be an enjoyable way to spend a delightful summer day!

Tropaeolum – Nasturtium



Tropaeolum majus – These common flowers are always popular to grow for their colorful petals and bright green, oval leaves. Most Nasturtium flowers have a sweet but tangy or stringent odor. The fragrance is delightful, yet a little questionable.

One additional feature is that all parts of the plant are edible. The leaves and flowers have a peppery taste and look festive when added to salads.

These plants are easy to sow and grow in full to partial sunlight. Avoid making the soil too fertile, for it will make the plants produce more vegetation instead of flowers.

Excellent varieties to include in your carefree garden are **Golden Gleam** and **Scarlet Gleam**. The flowers are semi-double (they have a few extra petals), and the color is a dark golden yellow or bright

orange-red. They are suitable to grow in hanging baskets to help bring the flowers closer to your nose, and, if you're hungry, to your mouth.

Zinnia



Zinnia elegans and ***hybrids*** – You may have sensed a pattern here in this ebook with several of the carefree and newbie gardener-friendly flowers. We have previously reviewed the Calendulas, Cornflowers, Sunflowers, Mexican Sunflowers, Shasta Daisy, and Marigolds. They and Zinnias belong in the same broad family of plants called Composites. They all have similar floral structures or appearances.

Like them, Zinnias are also simple to grow from self-sown seeds and easy to nurture in any garden. What is so surprising is they seem to have characteristics of all these other flowers combined. They have a broad range of vivid colors, big enough sized seeds to handle (especially for children), can be grown for cut flowers, and have different plant 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 probably because of the intense color of the flowers — especially those grown as a mixture of colors. Plus, it also helps when multitudes of butterflies come to land on them for nectar.

There are so many varieties to choose from, but I would recommend growing a hybrid variety. Why hybrids? The simple answer is resistance to the powdery mildew fungal disease. Old-fashioned Zinnias are notorious for being susceptible 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 where butterflies absolutely love to visit this variety. It is an heirloom type and not a hybrid. As I mentioned before, by not being a hybrid, it is susceptible to the powdery mildew fungus by mid to late summer.

Low-Maintenance Purchased Annual Plants

Some low-care garden flowers are more difficult to establish from sowing their seed directly in a garden bed. Yes, it is possible to do, but difficulties will happen. One problem is the seeds may be very tiny and get lost within the soil material, or it would take too long for the plants to fully develop if they were to germinate and grow. Therefore, purchasing the following plants is a good idea.

The following plants are popular and common to find in most garden centers and nurseries — both local and online businesses. If you take some time to prepare their growing requirements, you will have a blooming success worthy of bragging about to more experienced gardening friends or family. Hey, if they can grow them — so can you!

Begonia



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

Begonia semperflorens – Mother Nature appears to have outdone herself in creating certain plants. Begonias are an example of her endearment for she has over 1,300 species. Most of these species are tropical or semi-tropical, and they grow well in partly shaded flower beds or in containers.

No matter what type of growth, size, or shape, their main popularity lies with their showy and colorful leaves and flowers. The flowers can be simple, single-petaled blossoms to flamboyant, billowy, large-petaled ones. Their leaves can be dark green to bronze with random contrasting patterns.

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 becomes dry, but not the Sahara Desert dryness. If subjected to soggy soil, the stems and tubers will rot and kill the plant.

Some begonias develop tubers or thickened rhizomes (stems) that act as energy storage structures to survive during the dry seasons in the tropics, but will die if subjected to freezing conditions. The tuberous begonias are stunningly beautiful but can be “tricky” in maintaining their health and vigor.

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

These plants are easy to find and are the best low-maintenance Begonia you can plant in partly shady locations. Yes, it can become adapted to full sunlight but, depending on the variety or the species, that may cause discoloration of the flowers and excessive leaf dryness. Dappled sunlight or partly shaded locations and well-drained, fertile soil provide better growing conditions for these plants.

If you ever become tired and disillusioned over always planting Impatiens (mentioned later) in shady areas, these are a great substitute. But, unlike Impatiens, these plants dislike growing in consistently moist soil. Well-drained but fertile soil that periodically becomes dry is to their liking. Otherwise, constant wet soil will kill them.

I have seen spectacular bedding displays of these plants growing in party shady slopes or banks. Here, they had excellent drainage, and the abundant pink and white blossoms brightened areas under several large trees all summer and into the fall.

Even though they are excellent bedding plants, never underestimate the practicality of growing them in containers to highlight those dark areas

on a patio or deck.

You can raise all Begonias from seed, but that 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 their seeds are almost the size of dust particles. Naturally, you can raise blooming plants by sowing them, but it takes specific conditions and time — lots of time. Fortunately, many nurseries and garden centers offer plenty of inexpensive plants.

Coleus



Coleus blumei*; *Plectranthus scutellarioides* or *Solenostemon scutellarioides – Botanists are at it again, changing the names of our favorite flowering plants. This time they have changed the multi-colored Coleus to another tongue-twisting name. No, thank you. For our sanity and more comfortable use of this ebook, I will stick to the name of Coleus. We have to show the occasional civil disobedience, even if it is in gardening.

Native to Southeast Asia, Coleus has always been popular as colorful foliage annual plants 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. For my eyes, they resemble gorgeous stained-glass windows with vivid colors and unusual geometric patterns.

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, the full intensity of sunlight will damage the leaves, developing brown splotches and faded colors.

Coleus plants range in size from petite to extra-large — both in height and in leaf size. Whatever purpose you wish to display these plants there is, at least, one variety you can grow. Now, here is where Coleus has the potential to look horrible. Please take my advice to choose one colorful type (or two complementary color patterns) for beds or containers. My rule is to match items — don't mix them! Don't over-mix multi-colored varieties for their combined appearance can look ghastly.

Many growers raise most Coleus plants from seed and will have many leaf colors. No two plants will look alike. The most beautiful and expensive plants are cutting grown to keep their color complexities and leaf shapes. If you can afford it, purchase several for containers but not for flower beds. When grown in containers, you can get up-close-and-personal to enjoy those spectacular colors. They are worth growing!

Unlike most other plants listed in this ebook, Coleus will need more attention. I classify it as an “almost-a-carefree” annual, for it will need regular watering. The soil should be well-drained and fertile but avoid constant wet ground for the plant's roots, and stems will decay.

Many garden centers will offer these colorful plants but are higher priced than other annuals — but well worth the enjoyment of those vividly colorful leaves.

Impatiens



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 the most purchased flowering plants in any garden center or nursery. All hail *Impatiens walleriana*!

One other reason for their popularity is they are not the easiest of flowers to grow from seed. It can be a challenge to provide the best conditions for them to germinate and are scary-expensive to purchase a packet of seed.

Okay. Time for a tough-love intervention with all my fellow gardeners. Please don't hate me for what I am about to relate to you. Impatiens are, for me, sorry to say, BORING. There, I admit it. Each year, breeders

create new varieties, but they lack any profound color differences. How many shades of pink or orange do we need each year by plant breeders? Plus, Impatiens serve only as subjects of “flower bed gazing.” They lack any multi-tasking enjoyment, such as providing cut-flowers or attracting many pollinating insects such as bees and butterflies. This would be heresy-talk in many gardening circles!

Impatiens need to grow in shady areas — especially the white and pale lavender varieties. Those colors look great when grown in large, shady beds or as sporadic individual “points of light” when grown with 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. These varieties have better disease resistance and tolerate more sunshine. They can also offer more vivid colors — not only to the flowers but some with eye-catching variegated leaves. These varieties look fabulous when grown in partly sunny areas.

Pelargonium – Zonal Geraniums



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

Pelargonium hybridum – Other than Impatiens, our common “geraniums” are mass-planted in gardens 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 detailed explanation trap. I will let *Google* handle that mind-numbing lesson. Let’s call them geraniums and concentrate on the flowers, shall we?

Our common geraniums have either solid green leaves or a variegated, or contrasting bronze band called zonal leaves. These small, but bushy plants have semi-succulent stems topped with clusters of pink, violet,

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

These plants prefer to grow in as much sunlight as possible and in well-drained, fertile soil. If you meet these conditions, you should have no problem growing them in a garden. Their best attraction is when growing in containers. It might be because the container soil drains excess water and dries faster than in a garden setting.

They are succulent plants — having stems that retain water even when the soil dries. Being able to survive in drier soil is key to having healthy, floriferous plants. This does not mean they behave like cacti, for if the ground remains too dry for too long, the plants may not recover and eventually die. If the soil remains too wet for a long time, the roots and main stem will rot. Please check the dryness of the soil every few days, especially if it has not 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. Hey, what do a few minutes matter each week to perform this essential cosmetic function?

Petunia – 'Wave Series'



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

Petunia hybrida – 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 continually blooming — hybrid petunias came on the scene. Instead of growing in a more upward fashion, like its species heritage, this new hybrid grew horizontally — on an average of three feet in diameter. It developed the characteristics of a groundcover that carpets a flower bed all summer-long.

This new hybrid strain, and its developing multi-colorful ensemble, became famously known as the **Wave Series**. It became an instant hit with gardeners because of its quick growth habit and ability to continue making flowers without the need to pick off sticky spent blossoms. Older petunia varieties would develop many seed pods, and eventually, the plants shut down further flower production. 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.

Do you see where I am heading to advise you on what type of petunia to plant in your carefree garden?

Since 1995, more types of Wave petunias are now available. You can choose from:

- The “oldie but goodie” **Original Wave** with additional colors;
- **Easy Wave** having slightly taller growth (but still a groundcover);
- **Tidal Wave**, which spreads outward more, and –
- **Double Wave Series** having 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 seed. That’s great if you can do so with the right equipment, knowledge, and time, but purchasing these plants from almost every garden center or nursery is more practicable to a new gardener.

All types and varieties of petunias — new and old — have a rainbow of colors (I am partial to blue and purple) for you to choose from. They need as much sunlight to grow and bloom well. As usual, with all other flowers, they need fertile, well-drained soil to develop and look their best.

Yes, they need regular watering and light-fertilizing, but spend some time with these flowers and take care of them. They will reward you

with endearing acclaims and admiration (with some green-eyed envy)
from your friends and family.

Conclusion

Well, that was a long list, wasn't it? And, believe it or not, there are more flowers you can grow in your garden classified as being semi-carefree. They will need extra attention on your part for them to grow and bloom well.

Many gardeners, nursery owners, growers, and garden writers (better ones than me) believe the above list of plants is more user-friendly for newbie gardeners to grow.

I did not include any shrubs or trees, for they take longer to grow and bloom. Roses are always a vital woody shrub (or bush) in any garden but can be a pain in the "you-know-where" to manage properly because of disease (blackspot fungus) and ravaging insects (like Japanese Beetles.) Sorry, I could not bring myself to list them in this ebook.

Let's recap on what to observe when beginning to develop a low-maintenance flower garden:

- It's essential to determine how much sunlight or shade the bed or border receives during the day. Most of the above plants prefer as much sunlight as possible. This does not mean continuous light for a tree or two can partially shade them with no ill effects.
- Your soil should always be well-drained. Most clay-based soils are notorious for causing gardeners problems because clay can retain water to the point of being "gummy" and later turn rock-hard dry. This will kill plants, especially perennials.
- Before planting, take the time (and expense) to incorporate coarse sand or gravel to "fluff up" the soil. If your soil is too sandy, add plenty of humus or decayed leaf-matter into the ground to improve water retention. Count yourself lucky if your soil is "just right."
- Do you remember high school chemistry class? Maybe you don't wish to remember, but you should test your garden soil

pH level to determine if it is excessively acidic or basic. Most large garden centers offer free professional testing (relax, you don't have to do it) and give you advice on how to "balance" the pH for better plant growth. I'll let them explain the simple process.

- As mentioned in the section on sowing seeds outdoors, I advise adding a two-inch deep layer of pea-size gravel to the surface of the flower bed soil. This allows the seeds to filter within the sand or gravel particles. Sprinkle water on the gravel once a day to keep it moist until the seeds germinate. It's okay if the gravel dries out for a while. It is only the top area of the stones that dry, and where the seeds nestle themselves, it is usually moist.
- And this is the most critical point of all — mistakes happen. Some seeds will not germinate, plants from garden centers can die mysteriously, and insects, snails, and slugs have the capability of eating all your plants. All I can say is, "it happens to us all!"

"Wait one minute," you are thinking. "I thought this was a carefree and low maintenance method of flower gardening? What's with all these issues when beginning to garden?"

Point taken.

Gardening is like playing a game. To play, you need to establish and know the rules. The above "rules" are important, so your plants will grow well for you. By taking care of these basic requirements helps to keep you from being disappointed by dead plants and disillusioned from gardening further.

Gardening can frustrate you when things do not go well. Take heart, for most of the time, your flowers will grow and bloom.

Now, get busy planning, digging, planting, sowing, and getting your hands dirty. You're on the way to becoming a lifelong gardener. That's a delightful life-affirming title!

Thank you for reading this ebook.

I hope this ebook has been helpful to you in learning which beautiful flowers I consider easy-to-grow or display low-maintenance qualities.

Please visit my author website of <https://gedwinvarner.com> concerning 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 early experience and learning led him to receive a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology with a minor in Botany.

For twenty years he successfully owned and operated a fragrant flower mail-order nursery. 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.