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The Potting Shed

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Sun-loving annuals for quick color

Asked what plants require little care and no winter storage, annuals would be the answer.

They give even the most inexperienced gardener the confidence to have a successful garden. Annuals allow for a great amount of freedom in garden design and can color the garden till the frost nips them.

Many seasoned gardeners view annuals as garish, short-lived plants. I like to think of annuals as plants with non-stop color to fill spaces in the garden when perennials and bulbs finish blooming. There are bulbs such as dahlias, gladioli, cannas and crocosmias that can be treated as annuals if you choose not to dig them up and not provide winter storage for the next season.

The Brooklyn Botanic Garden has a book, *Designing Borders for Sun and Shade* by Bob Hyland. It highlights popular annuals for sun and for shade that are recommended for creating a four-season border mixed with perennials, shrubs, ornamental grasses and bulbs. Some of the following are found in the book.

POPULAR SUN-LOVING ANNUALS

African daisy (*Arctotis*) is native to South Africa and its daisy-like blooms grow 2 to 3 inches across on stems 1 to 2 feet tall. The flower heads come in shades of yellow, pink, brown and tangerine. In spring and fall is when the plant blooms most heavily, slowing down in hot summer weather. During heavy blooming, water regularly. The attractive flowers are pretty in a bouquet. African daisies are most effective in mass plantings and in front of borders, especially where they receive reflected heat from sidewalks or walls.

California poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*) is cultivated as an annual in most regions. Its satiny orange petals vary in shades from yellow to deep burnt orange and are ideal on border edges, gravel paths and drives. Other color selections are cream, red, pink, rose, white and violet. California poppies team up nicely with low growing ornamental grasses in shades of purple or blue such as purple moor grass (*Molina caerulea*) or blue fescues (*Festuca*). They add a meadowlike airiness to a mixed border.

Flowering tobacco (*Nicotiana glauca*) sends out a strong, pleasant fragrance especially in the summer evening. Blooms are trumpet-shaped appearing at the ends of branches. Choice of flowers are

a greenish-yellow, pale pink, deep rose, white. The nodding tubular blooms are appealing to hummingbirds. For a pretty combo in the garden, team up flowering tobacco and the fuzzy, coarse-leaved, silver sage, or plant the soft, gray, velvet lamb's ears with the flowering tobacco.

French marigold (*Tagetes patula*) is an easy-to-grow annual globular shaped annual with hardy, long-lasting flowers generally found in bright orange, lemon yellow, gold, maroon, and the white and cream shades are becoming increasingly popular. The plant is strongly scented, and the feathery foliage also carries a heavy scent. Marigolds tolerate drought conditions and are good companion plants in the vegetable garden as well.

Mexican zinnia (*Zinnia angustifolia*) thrives in hot weather and is at its showiest in July and August. Bright orange flowers can measure from 1 to 1 1/2 inches in size on erect, bushy plants to two feet tall. Mildew can occur on the plant in very humid climate.

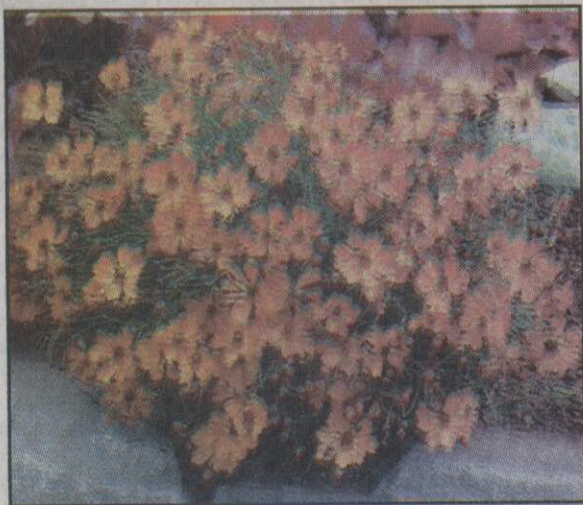
Petunia (*Petunia*) is one of the most popular sun-loving annuals. Their popularity is attributed to a neater, more compact growth, an improved heat and rain tolerance and smaller and more numerous flowers. Available as bush or cascading varieties, petunias can easily fill a sunny spot in a border, a window box or hanging basket.

With a range of colors—white, pink, red, pale yellow and deep bluish-purple, petunias are great as fill-ins once bulbs and perennials have run their course. Most petunias have a lovely, spicy fragrance. *Rainmaster*, dates back to the early 1800s, and its white two-inch blooms are heavily scented; the plant is more upright, reaching to two feet tall.

Portulaca (also called moss rose or rock moss) (*Portulaca Grandiflora*) is a creeping succulent and can easily spread a colorful carpet of bright single and double blossoms over the poorest, but well-drained soil. In a rock garden, a planter or any problem area, portulaca's exuberant colors reflect the sun that give the petals sheen.

Plant annuals and your garden can have color from early spring until nipped by frost.

The following books may give you more ideas on sun-loving annuals for your garden: *Designing Borders for Sun and Shade*, by Bob Hyland, Brooklyn Botanic Garden All-Region Guides. *Annuals for Every Purpose* by Larry Hodgson, Rodale Press. *Annuals and Tender Plants for North American Gardens*, By Wayne Winterrowd, Random House.



'Mango Punch,' a bright orange new coreopsis. (Photo courtesy of Terra Nova Nurseries)