

Flower Gardening

by Amy Barr, MS in Horticulture and Crop Science, and Program Assistant, 4-H Youth Development, Ohio State University Extension.

Reviewed by Pam Bennett, State Specialist, Horticulture, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Ohio State University Extension.

Do you want to develop your passion for growing flowers? You may have already taken the project *How Does My Garden Grow?*, which helps beginning flower gardeners understand the basics of annual flowers. This Idea Starter gives you more experience growing annuals and discusses growing other kinds of flowering plants too, namely perennials and bulbs.

First, it helps to know your goal for growing flowers. Are you hoping to have fresh blooms to cut for arrangements? Do you want to hide an unattractive landscape feature such as an air conditioner? Are you trying to attract butterflies or hummingbirds? There are many good reasons for growing flowers, but each requires a different approach. For example, if you want to have cutting flowers available for as much of the year as possible, you might want to plant a variety of perennials that bloom at different times of the growing season. Annuals that bloom all summer, especially those with strong stems, can supply extra blooms during the warmer months. Spring flowering bulbs such as daffodils and tulips also make beautiful additions to flower arrangements. If you get really serious about having indoor blooms in the winter, you might want to force bulbs such as amaryllis, paperwhites and hyacinth.

Second, decide where to plant flowers. Begin by creating a site plan of your house and yard. Start by making a simple drawing of the buildings, trees and hardscapes such as a driveway or patio. Add any large shrubs and flower beds. The site plan can be expanded to include useful information such as shade and sun areas, windy spots and areas that are most vulnerable to critters such as deer and rabbits. You also might want to label your site plan with common uses. For instance, if your family enjoys playing soccer in a certain part of the yard, they will not appreciate a



PLAN YOUR PROJECT

Use this idea starter AND publication 4-H 365 *Self-Determined Project Guide* as the starting place for your 4-H self-determined project. The *Self-Determined Project Guide* is available from your county OSU Extension office or on the Web at ohio4h.org/selfdetermined. You may choose to do a little or a lot depending on your level of interest. Be sure to register your project with your county OSU Extension office.



border of hydrangea through their athletic field. You do not want a soccer ball crushing your plants either! A shaded spot at the end of a shed or garage might be just the place, providing masses of beautiful, fragrant blooms that hide an otherwise unattractive view. Making a site plan allows you to get your landscape ideas down on paper, leading to a more thoughtful process and greater success.

How can a site plan help? If your property contains walnut trees, for example, you might want to draw a zone around them. Black walnut trees excrete a chemical called juglone that is toxic to certain plants. On the other hand, some plants are immune. Anyone with a black walnut tree needs to be careful about selecting plants to grow in the area around the tree.

Try growing different types of flowering plants. Annuals are plants that die at the end of the growing season. Perennials, which typically take longer to complete their lifecycle, tend to die back to the ground each winter, although their roots remain alive year round. Woody plants include trees and shrubs, many of which have interesting branches that can be used in your fresh flower arrangements. Bulbs and bulblike plants—such as corms, tubers and rhizomes—produce beautiful flowers for landscape or container use. You will discover exotic plants, such as tropical, too. Some are hardy and others need to be dug and brought inside for protection during the winter.



Some poppies are annuals and some are perennials.

- **Annuals.** Plants that complete their lifecycle including flowering and setting seed in one growing season.
- **Perennials.** Plants that live and grow for many years; the top of the plant dies back in the winter and then grows from the roots again the next spring.
- **Bulbs.** Underground stems or roots that contain food for the plant.
- **Tropicals.** Plants native to the tropics typically requiring warm and humid conditions.



Tulips are bulbs that can be grown in gardens or containers.

Keeping records is very helpful to the flower gardener. Have a place to record new plant purchases and save receipts. Some plants have warranties, and the receipts can save a lot of guesswork later if something goes wrong. When you want to buy more of a plant that is successful for you, good records allow you to find the names of specific varieties and where they were purchased. You may want to keep track of when plants bloom and how rain and temperature affect them. You may even want to make notes about when your favorite garden centers hold sales so that you can plan your purchases. Notes about insects, diseases, and any other problems can help you deal with them as you determine patterns and plan ahead for pest management strategies. Include pictures of your plants and garden. They are helpful reminders when planning future garden projects.

Even in small spaces, many blooms can cascade from hanging baskets, patio pots or window boxes. Plants for these containers need extra consideration. You want flowers that bloom over a long period of time and that are appropriate for sun and shade conditions. You also can use plants with interesting foliage to accent the container. Plants in containers are likely to dry out quickly, so make sure they are located near a convenient water source. They need daily attention, especially in the hot summer months. They also require regular fertilization based on label recommendations.

Ready to get your hands dirty? Your interest in gardening can grow into a lifelong passion and even a career. Get started by exploring the following.

AREAS OF INTEREST AND THINGS TO DO

Every self-determined 4-H project can be broken down into areas of interest. These are the specific things members want to address during their project adventures. Using 4-H 365 *Self-Determined Project Guide*, identify at least three areas of interest with at least three activities per area to explore. Take your ideas from the list below or make up your own.

Landscape Design

- Determine your purpose for growing flowers. Write down at least two reasons and share them with your project helper.
- Make a site plan of your home. Begin by using graph paper to make a scale drawing of your yard and any buildings, driveways, fences, patios or other structures on your property. Add details such as existing trees, shrubs, flower beds and other landscaping.
- Make a list of areas that would benefit from the addition of new plants. Determine the light and soil quality of these areas so that you can amend the soil if necessary. Identify plants likely to do well in each area.
- Investigate the meaning of the saying “right plant, right place.” Based on what you learn, explain its meaning to other new gardeners in a brochure, display or video.

- “Call Before You Dig” is a national program that encourages homeowners and others to call 811 before digging, even for small projects like planting trees or shrubs. Find out more about the program and create a brochure to raise awareness in your community.

Annuals

- Investigate what you need to grow annuals from seed. Start seeds indoors six weeks before your frost free date.
- Share seeds or transplants with a friend to increase variety and save money.
- Plant and care for at least two types of shade-loving annual flowers.
- Plant and care for at least two types of annuals that grow in sun or part sun.
- An heirloom plant is one grown through open pollination. Learn more about heirloom plants and pollination, and collect and store seed for future use.



Hostas are perennials often used as accents in flower gardening.

Perennials

- Make a list of perennial plants currently growing in your landscape.
- Divide a perennial that is getting crowded. Plant it in a new area at your home or give a portion to a neighbor or friend.
- Comparison shop at local nurseries, garden centers and farmers’ markets for new perennials. Make a record of the name, price, size and health of the plants.
- Plant and care for two or more flowering perennials in your landscape.
- Identify two pollinating insects in your perennial flowers.

Bulbs

- ❑ Select a reference book on flowering bulbs for your area from a library or bookstore. Use it to learn about bulbs and to identify ones that interest you.
- ❑ Look through mail order catalogs or view websites to get inspiration for the types of bulbs you would like to grow.
- ❑ Force some bulbs for early indoor bloom.
- ❑ Plant a group of bulbs in the landscape for naturalizing.
- ❑ Create a cut flower arrangement out of bulbs you have grown.
- ❑ Lift and store tender bulbs such as dahlias at the end of the season for the next growing season.

Garden Journal

- ❑ Create a journal with plenty of room for weekly notes, pictures, and gardening information.
- ❑ Use a gardening mobile app to track the growth of your plants or to look up information about them.
- ❑ List dates that your flowers are in bloom and number of blooms produced.
- ❑ Keep a record of any diseases or pests that disturbed your flowering plants and what measures you took to protect them. Make your own recommendations for next time.
- ❑ Record weekly observations about weather and its impact on your plants and your watering schedule.

Containers

- ❑ Look through magazines or take pictures at a garden center of containers that appeal to you. Make a list of the plants they contain.
- ❑ Prepare containers by making sure they are clean and have appropriate drainage.
- ❑ Find suitable flowering plants for your containers' locations. Be careful to use plants that have similar light and water needs as well as colors that are attractive together.

- ❑ Check the condition of your container plants daily. Deadhead spent blooms or pinch back plants that are getting leggy. Keep soil moist for optimum growth and fertilize according to the fertilizer label.
- ❑ Rotate containers weekly so that all plants receive similar light. This is especially important for containers being grown alongside a building.
- ❑ Grow a flowering plant indoors. You may want to try something tropical like an orchid that typically would not grow in your hardiness zone.
- ❑ Take cuttings from your containers to produce more plants. Ivies and sweet potato vine are easily grown by rooting in water.



Group several containers of flowers to create a pleasing display.

RELATED RESOURCES

Plant Propagation, extension.missouri.edu/publications/mg3

Plant Propagation from Seed, pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-001/426-001

Ohio State University Extension is part of The Ohio State University College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences.

CFAES provides research and related educational programs to clientele on a nondiscriminatory basis. For more information, visit cfaes.osu.edu/nondiscrimination. For an accessible format of this publication, visit cfaes.osu.edu/accessibility.