

Want to spend less time maintaining your flowers?



Carla Keast

AROUND THE YARD

Decide what you're shopping for before you hit the nursery this spring; otherwise everything's going to be equally tempting! But all flowers are not the same.

The burst of colour that greets you when you enter the nursery is usually from the annuals. They start at \$2 for four to six plants, flower all summer, and then die.

Annuals tend to be higher mainte-

nance. They need hardening off (moving them outside for the day and inside for the night) while they become acclimatized.

They must be transplanted, watered regularly (which can be daily for those in pots), and most require deadheading to stimulate continuous flowering. Come fall or spring, the remains will need to be removed.

But if you love having the same flowers in bloom all summer, annuals are your choice. Figure out where you'd most enjoy a splash of colour and invest your time in them.

While Mardi Gras is going on in the annuals, the perennials will be holding a

Mix 'n' Mingle.

There'll be a few decked out in blossoms, but many will have just a few leaves. Perennials start at \$4 per plant, throw out a fabulous display for a few weeks, and return year after year.

Perennials tend to be lower maintenance. They require regular watering during their first season as they settle in, and then seldom after that. Their dead stalks need to be cut back annually, and after a few years, they'll need to be divided.

Understanding your garden's growing conditions is important for lower maintenance. Generally, a spot that receives more than six hours of sun daily is considered full sun; three to six hours is partial sun; and less than three hours is shade. Also check out the moisture. Even in a flat yard, there will be low-lying moist spots and high drier areas. Beds adjacent to trees and shrubs tend to be dry.

Each plant's ideal growing conditions will be listed on the plant label. Take that information seriously. A sun lover is never going to look good in shade, if it survives at all. Moisture lovers can do OK in dry locations if you water them regularly. But do you really want that on your to-do list?

The hardiness zone will be listed on the label and is important for perennials. Stick with perennials rated for zones two and three.



Supplied photo

Annuals give a bright burst of colour but require careful maintenance over time; be careful what you choose when you visit the nursery.

Hit the nursery armed with knowledge and you'll go home with tantalizing flowers — and extra time to enjoy them.

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