

Front Door ANNUALS

Flowers that
pack a punch

Story by Laurie Brown Klingel



Photo by Peggy Krapf.

What exactly are “Front Door Annuals”?

It’s fairly common for landscapes to have a bed reserved for annual color at or near the front entrance to the home. A shot of color at the front door is not only uplifting and cheerful, it gives you and your guests a sense of arrival and an inviting entrance. A gracious welcome, if you will. Though many people use a back or side door primarily, the front door and its immediate surroundings is still a public focal point and one of the main ingredients in achieving the widely sought after curb appeal. By

△ Purple angelonia is a standout when combined with lime-colored plants like this coleus. Vertical flowerscapes make angelonia an effective element when paired with low-growing or mounding plants.



Photo by Melissa Burdick.

△ Newer petunia hybrids offer intense color throughout the summer with little or no deadheading. A late-season trim and feed will keep them blooming until frost.

all means, plant flowers at every door, but consider strategically placing one or more annual beds near the formal entrance to your home for high impact color all season long.

Having a designated space reserved for annual color also takes some of the guesswork out of spring planning, yet still allows you the flexibility of trying new colors or varieties each season. Space the plants in these beds fairly close together in order to maximize color and minimize weed pressure. Instant gratification is not necessarily a bad thing when it comes to creating a robust show of color in a high visibility area. Take into account the mature size and form of the plant that you select, but don’t be afraid to tighten up the spacing a bit.

SUSTAINING HIGH PERFORMANCE ANNUALS

While many cultivated plants are considered low maintenance, very few are truly no maintenance. This is an important distinction to make because even the low-maintenance annuals outlined here will need some attention during the growing season to perform optimally.

Periodic watering may be necessary, especially during drought conditions. Some annuals, such as lantana and flowering vinca are extremely drought tolerant, while others, such as impatiens, may require more consistent moisture. Once your plants are established however, weekly watering is often sufficient.

Melampodium is a bright, sunny plant with generous blooms and mounding habit. It doesn't skip a beat in summer heat and humidity. ▶

Photo by Laurie Klingel.



Annuals for Sun

- *Melampodium* – Choose compact cultivars since some can be large and sprawling.
- *Zinnia angustifolia* – The Profusion and Zahara series are two good choices with many colors to choose from.
- *Lantana* – Low growing or compact cultivars are best for smaller beds. 'New Gold' never disappoints. ▶
- *Pentas lanceolata*, Egyptian star flower – Look for compact cultivars.
- Begonia, wax leaf – The Cocktail series is a solid choice and widely available; a versatile plant that tolerates full sun and bright shade.
- Impatiens hybrids – New Guineas (part sun) and SunPatiens are both excellent performers. Choose compact cultivars unless you have large beds.
- *Celosia* – The Fresh Look series are excellent performers.
- *Portulaca*, moss rose – Brilliant jewel-tone colors make this a favorite.
- Petunia hybrids – Easy Wave and Supertunia are excellent choices, though there are many good cultivars available.
- *Salvia farinacea* – 'Victoria Blue' is a popular and reliable variety.
- *Catharanthus roseus*, flowering vinca – The Cooler series is one of many good choices.
- *Angelonia* – Angelface, AngelMist and Carita are dependable cultivars that display good branching and stem strength.



Photo by Laurie Klingel.

Lantana is a favorite for its durability, bright colors and ability to attract butterflies.

Annuals for Shade or Part Shade

- *Impatiens walleriana* – Available in a multitude of colors and mixes; it's hard to go wrong with so many outstanding cultivars on the market.
- *Torenia*, wishbone flower – The Summer Wave and Catalina series are proven performers. ▼
- *Caladium bicolor* – Strap-leaved and fancy-leaved cultivars are available in numerous shapes, sizes and colors.
- Begonia, dragonwing and angel-wing – These cane begonias are becoming more widely available than in years past; you can ask for them by name.
- Begonia, wax leaf – These fibrous begonias are a good choice for part sun or bright shade.



Photo by Laurie Klingel.

Don't let the delicate appearance of Torenia fool you. This plant is as tough as nails and tolerates dry shade very well, once established.

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Photo by Laurie Klingel.



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△ Caladiums can offer a tropical effect to shady beds. They prefer 70 F soil, so wait until the soil warms before planting them out.

◁ Purple heart is fabulous paired with white or pink flowering annuals. This low-growing, vigorous trailer can provide great contrast and texture in an otherwise traditional annual bed.

Impatiens continue to be the most floriferous of all the shade annuals. Plant them with an interesting foliage companion to give new life to an old-fashioned favorite. ▷



Photo by Laurie Klingel.

Annual beds need not be boring monocultures. **Try some of these amazing companion plants** in combination with your flowering annuals to add a sophisticated and textural appeal:

- *Setcreasea purpurea* (syn. *Tradescantia pallida*), Purple heart
- *Cordyline australis* 'Red Star'
- *Plectranthus* cultivars
- *Strobilanthes dyeranus*, Persian shield
- *Coleus solenostemon* hybrids
- *Ipomea batatas*, Sweet potato vine
- ***Euphorbia Diamond Frost* ▷**
- *Senecio cineraria*, Dusty miller
- ***Pennisetum setaceum* 'Rubrum', Purple fountain grass ▷**

Wax begonia, *Euphorbia* Diamond Frost and purple fountain grass make an impressive combination. ▷



Photo by Laurie Klingel.

A safe and effective way to feed annuals is by applying a slow-release fertilizer once they've been planted. Some flowers, such as blue salvia, are known as heavy feeders and will benefit from periodic applications of liquid fertilizer, or what I call "the blue juice." A mid- or late-season application of liquid fertilizer is a good way to perk up your plants and promote optimum growth and flower production.

Front door annuals will require very little priming when sited properly. Nevertheless, a mid-season trimming and a bit of weeding can go a long way in keeping your annual beds in top shape. While deadheading is not generally necessary, some trimming of spent blooms and leggy stems can dramatically improve overall appearance and perk up a tired bed.

Some annual flowers are better than others for jazzing up the front entrance. My top picks must meet the following criteria:

Annuals or Tropicals?

Technically, annual plants complete their life cycle in one growing season, which is why they must be replanted every year. In our climate, however, tropical and subtropical plants are often referred to as "annuals" because they are not winter hardy here, and serve a similar purpose as annual plants. The term "annual" is used loosely in this article and refers to true annuals as well as tropical and subtropical perennials and woody plants.



Photo by Melissa Burdick.

Long Bloom Season

I like annuals that bloom early in the season and keep going through fall. As a plant fanatic, I reserve my more fleeting flowers for more intimate spaces. Front door annuals should deliver a consistent bang for your buck.

Reliable

Let's face it – some annuals are just more tried and true than others. At the front door, I want a plant that I know is going to perform as intended. While I'm a huge fan of testing out new plants, front door beds are not typically the place for such experiments.

Durable

These plants should be tough, forgiving and able to perform well within a wide range of conditions. Front door beds are not typically part of your garden per se, and will likely receive less of your time and energy.

High Impact

The biggest advantage of planting annuals is their ability to produce tons of flowers in a short period of time. Annual beds should have high impact flower-power that makes a statement and complements your existing landscape.

Well-behaved

I'm a big fan of annuals that don't flop, split, melt or fade. I call these well-behaved plants and they play a key roll in keeping a neat and tidy appearance at the front door. 🐾

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Photo by Melissa Burdick.



△ Few annuals thrive in dry conditions as well as flowering vinca. Its glossy green foliage, clear-colored flowers and low-maintenance needs make it a great choice for annual bedding.

Above: SunPatien show off strong foliage and flower color and grow well in full sun. Their relative, New Guinea impatiens are just as impressive, but thrive in part sun.