



May Tip of the Month Choosing the Perfect Annuals

Now that the gardening season is in full swing, and many of the area garden centers are loaded with annuals, perennials and flowering hanging baskets, let's take a few moments to discuss "the Good, the Bad and the Ugly" about choosing the right healthy plants for you garden. Ironically, one of the biggest problems that consumers face is the balance between what may be a good looking plant to some, what a superior plant to others is, and what price should one pay for an awesome, healthy, hardy Vermont-Grown plant; and quite honestly there is a big difference between these three choices.

So, let's start by looking at the initial aspect of choosing a healthy bedding plant. Frankly, you can always find healthy plants if you shop at the right garden center or greenhouse. Healthy, locally grown plants are generally the plants that experienced gardeners are lead to. Unfortunately, many novice gardeners learn during the initial phase of their experience that choosing the cheapest and most colorful plants are generally the most stressed annuals that money can buy. There may not always be a selection of annuals in "full bloom" to choose from when you walk down that greenhouse aisle, but don't kid yourself, because there is always the opportunity the find that the "best" plants were left behind. The general consumers are people lead to "color" on annuals and repeatedly, they swoop them up, filling their carts with skimpy colorful plants that may or may not have the most potential for being the best performers. We strongly recommend to always look for plants that are well branched, have healthy lush foliage and may have a few blooms cracking color, with plenty more lateral breaks, and buds to come along right after they get in the container or ground. Lush plants just spiking color are much happier being transplanted in the ground than a plant that has been sitting in a pot or a pack for several weeks in full color, and guaranteed, you will choose some of the finer quality plants. Remember, most every plant has the ability to perform in the garden if it is healthy when you purchase it. Good quality, Vermont-Grown plants are easy to obtain. You just need to find a great garden center that grows extraordinary plants (which is easy to find in Chittenden County). Healthy, hardy plants should not be an exception. When you purchase plant material that was shipped in from other countries or other states, grown in warmer climates where plants grow quicker in the containers, they are generally stressed out before the even reach the retailers benches. Buying local product not only guarantees that your plants will be healthy and less stressed but better performers in the garden for the entire season!

Price always has an impact on the quantity of plants you can afford and what you choose. Don't be fooled by the philosophy that cheaper is better when dealing with plants. Purchasing a small quantity of annuals in a large container is a perfect example of how consumers are fooled. A perfect example of this is purchasing a 15 or 18-count flat of Marigolds. Marigolds will grow for anyone, anywhere, in most any conditions. Buying 15 or 18 plants in a flat for \$10.00 is not necessary, when you can buy a 48-count flat for less than twice that. Yes, the plant in a 15 or 18-count flat might be a little larger at

the time of purchase, but two weeks after you plant the 48-count tray, you will never be able to tell the difference. Remember, many annuals grown in 6-pack trays will explode when you plant them in the ground; they are just itching to put their roots in the ground. Take advantage of the specials or the quantity discounts if you need lots of annuals to cover a vast area; again don't be fooled by cheap prices if you become educated on how to buy annuals.

Purchasing larger containers of annuals, such as 4.5" or 6" is also a great way to save money in the end. Buy less units for a little more money and in the end you will have a better, quicker show of color and will honestly be a little easier to plant. If you have ever planted a border of annuals along a large bed using six packs, one plant at a time, it's back breaking, and as soon as you get them in the ground they have dried out and sometimes cause a bit of aggravation for the caregiver of the yard. Larger containers are easy to plant, take less water and fertilizer (most of the time there has been a greater amount of fertilizer used during the growing process, therefore may require less feed during the season), and in the end give you a better show. Planting a few 4.5" pots of Supertunias can fill a 10" hanging basket if you are patient enough. Although our gardening season is very short in Vermont, some people just don't mind "watching them grow" and can season long enjoyment. A few years of playing with numbers and "learning as you garden" will quickly satisfy your palate.

Be patient, gardening is supposed to be fun, and picking out great healthy plants is the best way to start a beautiful, healthy, showy display; grown right here at Claussen's by fellow Vermonters!!