



FOR THE 'BEST EVER' FLOWERS

by Mike Serant



Fall is a special time a year for many reasons. One my favorite reason is the beautiful fall color we can enjoy with a variety of gorgeous fall & winter annual color. We buy them small and with the right care they bush out into these little mountains of blooms that bring joy every time we see them. Very inexpensively we can dress up any property.

The big keys from **an Organic point of view** are reduced culture stress and proper nutrition.

Cultural Stress - Annual fall flowers do not like a lot of water. Too much water brings on soil diseases which is the biggest problem facing our annual color. We often forget that summer is over and the heat is drastically reduced from the summer. Plus flowers are



always planted in prepared top soil which contains a lot of organic matter. Organic matter holds water. This is much different than the soil turfgrass is grown on which contains very little organic matter. On top of all this flowers always get a layer of mulch which further holds water.

Bed Preparation - We are not talking about a lot of space when we plant flowers even on large commercial properties so we can invest in great growing soil. True plant health begins in the soil. For new beds or containers look for quality top soil with properly aged compost, clean sand mixed in and is slightly acidic. The top soil must drain well and contain a lot of beneficial microorganisms.

If you don't want to replace the entire soil site then add quality, well-aged compost. You should plan for a cubic yard of compost to cover 125' - 250' before you work into the soil to a depth of 3" - 4". Good compost will be rich in beneficial microbes and nutrients.

Fertilization and Disease Prevention - These two major areas will go hand in hand. We already visited about 'not overwatering' and the beneficial microbes you get by adding well aged compost products. Remember when given a chance good microbes beat bad microbes every time. When buying new plants it is very important to look at the plants carefully (take a few out of the pot and look at the roots) to make sure they are healthy to start with.

At time of planting use 4 lb of a quality, granular organic fertilizer per 100 sq ft with a Nitrogen-Phosphate-Potassium of something like 8-4-6. Make sure the organic fertilizer has rich, diverse nutrient sources and does not contain any poultry products.

A well-made organic fertilizer will never burn and will be completely safe for all children and pets. Some of your better grade organic fertilizers will be inoculated with beneficial microbes as well. With this addition you want a large variety of beneficial microorganism species and in sufficient number to actually do you good. A properly made organic fertilizer will feed the indigenous microbes in your soil, the aged compost plus the inoculated organic fertilizer will then further increase the microbe numbers. The value will be increased growth and disease protection. Much like we see here:



After installation water in well with a well-made liquid organic fertilizer that contains seaweed, fish, molasses and humic acid to ease transplanting and to fast start the new planting. Finally apply a 1" layer of aged native hardwood mulch and Viola' ... you're done!

Follow Up - After initial use with the organic liquid fertilizer re-apply this product every 2 - 4 weeks as a foliar spray to keep your flowers jumping. Annual flowers are heavy feeders and will enjoy the nutrition you give them.

Conclusion - With healthy plants to start with, correct watering, healthy soil/mulch and quality organic fertilizers you will have outstanding flowers and another reason to smile this fall and winter.

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