



May Tips

PERENNIALS, ANNUALS AND BULBS

Contact: Diane Relf, Extension Specialist, Environmental Horticulture

- Some common ground covers suitable for sunny locations include Ajuga (*Ajuga reptans*), Moss Pink (*Phlox subulata*), and Creeping Juniper (*Juniperus horizontalis*).
- Lobelia (*Lobelia pendula*) is a great annual for hanging baskets or container gardens with its stems that trail about 8 inches. The 'Cascade' series is especially vibrant in colors of pink, white, lilac, maroon, violet, and blue. Most flowers have a white eye.
- Scented geraniums make fabulous air fresheners. Rub the leaves together, and they put forth aromas of coconut, rose, nutmeg, citrus, or mint. Scented geraniums have several different, attractive foliage forms and colors, often very finely lobed and light green. Place them near a patio or porch to add an intriguing scent when visitors brush against them.
- As soon as the danger of frost is over, amaryllis that was forced into bloom can be placed outdoors for the summer. The potted bulb should be placed in a shaded location and fertilized with 1 teaspoon of 5-10-10. Bring it back indoors before frost, and let the soil dry completely so the bulb will go into dormancy. After leaving it in a cool, dark place for eight weeks, bring it back into the light and begin watering again. In another eight weeks, your amaryllis should bloom again.
- Lightly sidedress perennials, including spring bulbs, with a 5-10-10 or 10-10-10 fertilizer, being careful to avoid the center or crown of the plant.
- If you love to garden, but don't have a lot of time, choose plants that are easy to maintain. Plants that do not need "deadheading" include begonia, impatiens, coleus, alyssum, ageratum, lobelia, vinca, and salvia.
- An interesting plant to grow is the umbrella palm (*Cyperus alternifolius*). It is excellent as a water plant or in very damp sites. It grows from 1- to 3 feet tall with 3 to 12 very slender, raylet leaves per stem (an umbel) in an umbrella-like pattern. Cyperus grows best in direct sun and very, moist soil. Maintain an adequate fresh water supply to provide oxygen for the roots. Insect pests include spider mite, mealy bug, thrip, scale, and whitefly. Propagating Cyperus is easy – divide the existing plant, or cut off and turn one of the umbels upside down in a glass of water and watch it root!
- Caladiums need generous amounts of water and fertilizer to encourage continuous production of new leaves during the summer. Apply a light, side dressing of 5-10-5 fertilizer every two weeks, and water thoroughly to encourage bright-colored foliage.
- If you are looking for plants that flower each year, require little care, and are rarely bothered by pests or disease, try some of these perennials: coneflower, bleeding heart, coralbell, daylily, geum, hosta, bergenia, Virginia bluebell, and veronica.
- These flowers save time and work in the garden by dropping dead blooms and thus requiring no trimming or dead-heading: mignonette, love-in-a-mist, cleome, scabiosa, and daylily.

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- Potted plants, when placed outdoors, may need to be watered more frequently than if they were inside. If you place plants in clay pots inside larger plastic pots or cover clay pots with aluminum foil, you will reduce the frequency at which you must water. Remember to punch a drainage hole if foil is used.
- Gladiolus grows best in well-drained soil, protected from wind. Bulbs can be planted now. For best bloom, water thoroughly once a week after the spike begins to show above the soil.
- Plant asters in a different part of your garden each year to minimize the possibility of aster wilt.
- Dig and divide dusty miller in the spring and replant the more vigorous, outside portions of the clump. Fertilize liberally during the growing season.
- Bright-red and deep-red salvias are good for concentrated color in full sun. Use the lighter or pastel shades of salvia in partial shade.
- Some seed catalogs are selling seed mixtures of flowers that produce edible blossoms for salad excitement. Try a sample from your flower border. Possibilities included are nasturtium (spicy flowers, buds, and leaves), calendula (bright color and warm flavor), various mints, borage (cucumber-flavored petals and foliage), violets and violas (somewhat of an apple flavor), and polyantha rose (aromatic).
- Lisianthus (*Eustoma spp.*) is a rediscovery in flowering plants. This half-hardy perennial has tulip-like buds that become poppy-like with maturity. A double form resembling a rose is also available. The flowers come in shades of white, pink, or blue. Lisianthus is outstanding as a cut flower and would be a welcome addition in any cutting garden you may be planning. Lisianthus is best started in individual containers to avoid disturbing roots when setting out. It is slow growing until roots are fully established. Pinch back to promote bushiness.
- Pinch back annuals when 4 to 6 inches high to promote bushy growth. Some that require pinching are zinnias, petunias, and salvia.
- Set out marigolds, petunias, ageratums, and fibrous begonias. All are good border plants.
- Impatiens is the most satisfactory annual for use in shady areas. Begonias, coleus, ageratum, salvia, and vinca prefer light shade (5 to 6 hours of sunlight.)
- Need a tall, bold plant in the back of the border, along a wall or fence, or even standing alone? Try these: cleome or spider flower makes a fine, airy, 4-foot or taller display; 'Giant Imperial' larkspur produces 4- to 5-foot spikes of white, red, and purple blooms; 'Summer Carnival' annual hollyhock bears 4-inch double flowers on 5-foot stems.
- Multiflora petunias withstand heat much better than other types and are more attractive throughout the summer. They are more resistant than other types to botrytis, a disease that cripples petunias, especially in damp weather. And they branch more easily, meaning less maintenance. Multifloras are most useful for massed effects in beds.
- Set petunia plants among fading tulips or daffodils to hide the unsightly wilting leaves. After the bulb foliage begins to fade, you can tie the leaves in gentle knots to neaten them, but don't remove them until they have dried completely.
- Grow your own dried flowers. Start seeds of statice, globe amaranth, strawflowers, and other everlastings to provide flowers for this year's arrangements.

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- Plant unusual summer flowering bulbs like Peruvian daffodil or Mexican shell flower for variety of form or color in the midsummer garden.
- In the past, begonias were recommended for areas of partial sun and full shade. However, they will also do well in full sun if kept moist and well mulched. 'Pizzaz' and 'Basel Hybrid' are two varieties that do particularly well in full sun.
- Design wildflower borders with the same care as any other border. Consider harmonies and contrasts of color, form, texture, plant height, and bloom times. The seed bed should be tilled thoroughly to a depth of 6 inches and compost or other organic material added. Force the weed seeds in the soil to germinate before sowing flowers by keeping the soil moist for a few weeks, then rake out the sprouting weeds. Mix the wildflower seeds with builders' sand in a 1 to 4 ratio and broadcast over the area. Rake the seeds in lightly and keep the bed moist until plants are well up.
- To grow annuals in pots on the patio, use a light-weight soil mixture. Keep the plants well watered, as container-grown plants dry out fast. Apply water soluble fertilizer according to package directions every two weeks.
- Don't be surprised if variegated hosta has green leaves when grown in the sun. The best, variegated, color pattern is developed on plants in a semi-shady location

Monthly Tips have been prepared since 1986 by various staff of the Office of Consumer Horticulture including Ellen Bennett, Michelle Buckstrup, Susan Day, Susan DeBolt, Sharon Dendy, Kate Dobbs, Sheri Dom, David Gravell, Virginia Nathan, Jenny Shuster, Ellen Silva, and Ruth Sorenson. Resource material for the development of this information includes the Virginia Master Gardener Handbook; Extension Publications and newsletters from VCE, numerous other states, and the USDA; and an extensive library of over 900 books, magazines and journals. Project funded by The Virginia Gardener Newsletter subscription fees. Diane Relf, Project Director and Content Specialist.

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