

## Growing Great Spring Flowers

Presenter: Lisa Mason Ziegler



**Growing the delightful group of spring blooming flowers known as cool-season hardy annuals is easy when we get the planting time right.**

Hardy annuals are often skipped in home gardens because of their awkward planting times. These flowers like cool weather--in fact, they thrive in it and take cold temperatures like a champ. Many are the earliest to bloom in spring and can play a key role in inviting and sustaining beneficial insects in the garden.

**Who are these flowers?** This group includes some of the most beautiful flowers of spring: Iceland Poppies, Snapdragons, Sweet Peas, Bupleurum, Bachelor's Buttons, Bells of Ireland, Pincushion Flower, Larkspur, Pot Marigold, Feverfew, Black-eyed Susans, White Lace Flower, Love-in-a-Mist, Sweet William, False Queen Anne's Lace, Corn Cockle, Bishop's Weed, Dill, and others.

**When is the right time to plant hardy annuals?** It is so scary planting transplants or seeds out in the frosty garden when wintry weather is just around the corner. But, in fact, that is exactly what these flowers want. The windows in which to plant hardy annuals are 6-8 weeks before your first fall frost and/or 6-8 weeks before your last spring frost. The choice depends on whether the particular flower is winter hardy in your winter hardiness zone. The flowers listed above are winter hardy to zones 7 and 8. This means they survive winter in those zones and can be planted in the fall to winter over as a young plant, having time to become well-established before spring.

**Why does the planting time change how they perform in the garden?** Allowing these plants to become established in the cool-to-cold conditions they prefer changes everything. The plants are able to develop a strong root foundation before being called on to grow, produce stems and bloom. When planted in traditional spring as many gardeners do, the plants just aren't happy trying to become established, grow, and bloom all at the same time. Well-established hardy annuals bloom earlier, produce more

and taller stems, are more disease and pest resistant, and they bloom longer into the warm summer.

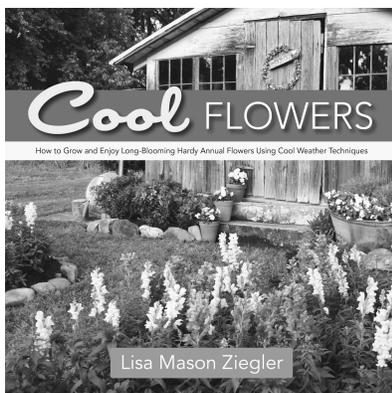
**Does this group support pollinators and other beneficial insects?** Yes! Many of these flowers are among the first flowers to bloom in spring like Bachelor Buttons and Pot Marigolds. Both offer food and habitat for pollinators during a season when their choices are few. Hardy annuals also roll out the welcome mat to nature's most powerful pest control: beneficial insects. Being invited to the garden early allows them to set up housekeeping and to get busy working on controlling pests in the garden. I attribute the large community of beneficial insects on my flower farm to the hardy annual blooms.

**How do I get started?** Typically, you will not find hardy annual transplants available at your local nursery at the planting time for your garden, so plan on starting from seed. There is no easier group of plants to start from seed than hardy annuals. Some prefer their seed to be planted out in the garden and others to be started indoors. Of those flowers listed on this handout, many do well with the seed being planted out in the garden in fall. Refer to *Cool Flowers* or my website for in-depth information on starting them from seed.

**Why is it so easy to plant hardy annual seeds and transplants in the garden?** The garden is just more hospitable in cool weather; less pest pressure, more frequent rain and snow for watering, and no heat stress for plants or people.

**How did we lose track of these spectacular and easy to grow flowers?** Because of the awkward planting times, I believe that this group fell out of retail fashion. What I mean is as we started purchasing more plants and less seed to start ourselves, this group of plants just fell away. The planting times for hardy annuals doesn't occur during the typical plant shopping seasons so they just got dropped through the years.

**Change spring forever in your garden: grow cool-season hardy annuals!**



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***Cool Flowers: How to Grow and Enjoy Long-Blooming  
Hardy Annual Flowers Using Cool Weather Techniques***

***By Lisa Mason Ziegler***

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