FLOWERS symbolise love, passion, innocence, purity, and elegance. We love flowers for their beauty, aroma and diversity. Since ancient times flowers have been used as part of different customs, rituals and other socio-cultural events in our society.

The varied agro-climatic condition of our country is a boon for growing different types of flowers with a wide range of colours. Often while looking at displays of such flowers in flower shows, fairs, market places, lawns etc., we are motivated to grow them in our houses. Although in rural areas land may still be available, in cities and towns due to rapid urbanization land is hard to come by.

But you can still fulfill your desire of surrounding yourself with plants and flowers by growing annuals and shade loving plants – both outdoors and even indoors within the available space in your house. You can have plants with attractive flowers growing in your gardens, lawns, rock gardens, shrubbery borders and also in lofty verandahs, balconies, window boxes, pots, hanging baskets etc. here's how to do it.

Growing Annual Flowers
Annual flowering plants are herbaceous plants. They grow from seeds and complete their life cycle within a season or year.

Annuals can be grown very easily during summer season, rainy season and winter season. Plants grown during the summer season are known as summer season annuals. Cosmos, portulaca, sunflower, zinnia etc. are some examples of summer season annuals. Rainy season annuals are amaranthus, balsam, cock's comb, marigold etc. Winter season annuals are antilinum, aster, calendula, carnation, chrysanthemum, hollyhock, marigold, pansy, petunia, phlox, salvia, sweet pea, sweet william, veibena etc.

Depending on the varied agro-climatic conditions of our country, seeds of summer season annuals are generally sown from the mid of February till March, rainy season annuals are generally sown during later part of April to second week of May and winter season annuals from last week of August to middle of October.

Annual flowers are generally propagated by seeds. So, it is always advisable to procure seeds from recognised or reliable sources packed in sealed packets or containers. Loose seeds available in the local markets need to be phenotypically judged by close examination of the seeds before procuring. These seeds should not be broken, shriveled, wrinkled, or discoloured. Seeds should be of uniform size, bold and free from inert materials. Good quality seeds along with adoption of proper cultivation techniques will always give better quality flowers.

Once the seeds are obtained, they are generally sown in nursery beds of suitable sizes after tilling the soil properly. Normally, beds of sizes 1.5 m to 2 m in length and 1 m in width are prepared after obtaining a good soil tilth. The beds are raised to a height of 6 to 8 cm from the ground level. Addition of 12 kg of well-rotted Farm Yard Manure (FYM) to the beds improves soil health. However, the sizes of the beds may vary as per your convenience.

Seeds may be sown in lines maintaining a distance of 6 cm between each row and 0.5 to 0.75 cm between
the plants. Judicious watering on the beds also helps in better germination of seeds. While the seedlings start growing, in the mean time, the main plot(s) is/are made ready by thoroughly spading the soil followed by addition of 6 kg FYM, 20–30 gm Urea, 35–40 gm Single Super Phosphate (S.S.P.) and 10–12 gm Muriate of Potash (M.O.P.) per sq m. When the seedlings attain four to five leaf stage they are ready for transplanting on the main plots.

The manner in which you arrange the seedlings depends on your choice – planting the annuals based on their height or flower colour or a combination of both. For planting annuals according to height, tall annuals like, chrysanthemum, holly hock, sunflower etc. are planted at the back followed by medium height annuals like balsam, carnation, celosia, marigold, salvia etc. in the middle and smaller ones like pansy, petunia, phlox etc. in the front. Flower colour of an annual varies considerably. For example, colour of pansy ranges from white, yellow, blue, red etc. So planting of annuals according to colour is very complex and needs rich experience.

Now, for transplantation, with the help of hand hoe (khurpi) the healthy seedlings are taken out of the nursery beds, such that the roots remain embedded in a soil ball and are the least disturbed. Transplanting is generally done during late evening hours at a spacing of 10 to 50 cm. You can leave less space for dwarf plants while more spacing is given to the tall plants. This is followed by watering.

At pre-flowering stage, 35–40 gm S.S.P. and 10–12 gm M.O.P. per sq m is applied. For growing annuals in pots, window boxes, hanging baskets etc., potting mixture comprising garden soil, sand and well rotten cow dung or vermicompost in the ratio of 2:1:1 is applied. The seedlings are then planted in the evening followed by light watering. As the plants establish themselves in pots and start producing new leaves and shoots one may apply one to two tablespoon of urea dissolved in 1 litre of water, once in two months interval. Application of bone meal helps in better quality of flowers.

You must ensure that the plants receive ample sunlight for growth and development. Plants with weak or asymmetrical stems need stacking.

Pinching off the terminal buds of dianthus, marigold, carnation etc. helps in formation of more lateral branches giving the plants a bushy appearance and producing more flower buds. However, to obtain large flowers in plants only a few buds are retained in the plants and the other unwanted buds are removed. Judicious watering, regular hoeing, removal of dried or decayed plant parts will help in better growth and flowering of the annuals.

Growing Shade Loving Plants

Shade loving plants are those plants that grow well in shade or partial shade. They are grown under trees, in verandahs of buildings and even used for interior decoration of business places, hotels, shopping malls etc. by growing them in pots. Their beautiful foliages are very
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Attractive, so they are also known as ‘Foliage Plants’. As they grow well in pots we also call them ‘Pot Plants’.

There are a number of shade loving plants. Some of the easily available shade loving plants are Aglaonema, Alocasia, Coleus, Croton, Dieffenbachia, Dracaena, Fern, Heliconia, Monstera, Money plant etc. Aglaonema, Alocasia, Fern, Heliconia etc. can be propagated easily by separating the suckers arising from the base of the mother plant. Coleus, Croton, Dieffenbachia and Dracaena are propagated by stem cuttings. Distal end of the cuttings placed in sand or sandy soil with regular watering helps in easy rooting. Cutting the vines of Monstera and Money plant having small roots are preferred. Propagation is generally carried out during the rainy season.

These plants grow well in pots of sizes 14 inches or more in diameter. Earthen pots are generally preferred for planting, as the very fine pores present in the pots help in better exchange of air and moisture inside and outside the pots creating a congenial environment for root growth.

Planting is generally done during the summer season. Before planting the saplings or the rooted cuttings, a small rock or a small broken brick is placed inside the pots covering the holes to drain out the excess water and also prevent unnecessary loss of soil particles outside the pots during watering. This also helps to prevent the floor surface underneath from spoilage.

The pots are filled with thoroughly mixed garden soil, sand and organic matter (like well rotten cow dung or vermicompost) in the ratio of 2:1:1 part. While filling up the pots with soil, 1 inch of the pots should be left empty from the top for ease of post planting operations. Once the pots are ready, plant the saplings in the centre of the pots in an upright position. During planting, care should also be taken such that the roots are less broken.

After planting, watering is done slowly around the potted (planted) saplings and they are kept in partial shade. Regular watering in the evening hours will help the plants to produce new leaves and shoots. Excess water will automatically drain out from the bottom. The growth of the plants will also depend on the availability of...
sunlight. Established potted plants are kept inside the rooms or verandahs or other lofts for beautification purposes. Plants kept inside the rooms for a longer period, receiving no sunlight, may show drooping appearance followed by yellowing of leaves. These plants need watering and should be shifted to a place with sunlight for a few days until they exhibit a healthy appearance.

Application of one tablespoon of urea dissolved in one litre of water (only once) in the pots helps them regain their natural health. In general, feeding the plants at least once in two months with organic fertilisers along with bone meal is beneficial. During application of fertilisers, hoe the pot soil around the stem with a khurpi or other suitable implement and mix the soil with fertiliser or manure. This is followed by irrigation.

Once in a year repotting is preferred. During repotting, preferably in the month of March, the basal part of the plant (in the pot) is placed between the forefinger and middle finger such that the palm adheres the soil or the pot. Then slowly, with the other hand, the pot is turned upside down and slowly hit on any hard object giving it a jerk. Gradually, the root zone soil slips out of the pot along with the plant. Parts of the soil adhering to the roots are gently removed, excess roots are cut and the pot is thoroughly cleaned. After cleaning, the pot is again filled with potting mixture just like the first time and the plant along with the soil is planted again. Repotting helps better growth and maintains the health of the roots and other plant parts.

Apart from growing in pots, shade loving plants can also be grown in rock gardens, herbaceous borders, shrubbery borders, along boundaries and as live fences of gardens.

The choice of annuals or shade loving plants for growing at home(s), balconies, boxes, indoor decoration, lawns etc., will depend on you. Proper pre-planning, sincere effort, discussions with gardeners and regular care of the plants will not only help to add beauty to your surrounding but will also provide mental serenity and satisfaction to you and your neighbours.

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