

Top 10 annuals for landscaping

BY JESSICA ATCHISON

You know a good landscape needs anchor plants: trees, shrubs, and other perennials that keep providing color year after year. However, to keep the landscape lively, you've got to mix in some new, different annuals each season. Take a look at this "Top 10" list, which contains some of the most popular, reliable choices you can make. It contains items for sun or shade, cool or hot weather and humid or dry conditions.

Impatiens. The #1 bedding plant in the world, impatiens are the perfect choice for shady landscapes, where they combine well with other shade-lovers like hostas or ferns. Available in a huge range of flower colors, patterns and forms, impatiens offer loads of color and are very low-maintenance. Plant them in well-drained soil in full to partial shade areas. New Guinea hybrids are more tolerant of sunlight.

Petunia. Petunias are native to the wilds of South America, but they've been tamed to become some of the world's most recognizable bedding plants. With a variety of flower forms (single or double, smooth or ruffled) and lots of colors and patterns to choose from, petunias are marked by their dependable, versatile garden performance. Use them in beds, baskets or containers in sunny landscapes. With regular watering and occasional feeding, they'll bloom all season.

Angelonia. A relative newcomer to the landscape, angelonia is also called "Summer snapdragon" for its small, snapdragon-like blooms. Great for adding



height to beds and borders, angelonia grows 18 to 24 inches tall and produces an abundance of blossoms on each spire. Angelonia performs best in full sun. It is typically available in shades of purple, but plant breeders have produced a variety of other colors as well.

Geranium. Great for containers, landscape beds and borders, geraniums are staples in many summer gardens. Upright, zonal geraniums are most commonly planted in landscapes, but trailing ivy geraniums are also available and suitable for baskets and containers. Each plant produces small flowers that are clustered together in umbels atop tall stems. Geraniums have lovely foliage, and many varieties are fragrant.

Vinca. Sometimes called "Madagascar periwinkle" in honor of its tropical island origins, vinca is an upright plant that produces large, five-petaled flowers. Great for sunny landscape beds and containers,

vinca is generally available in varying shades of pink, purple, peach, white and red. Some varieties produce flowers of one color with darker "eyes," or centers. Vinca also has lush, dark green foliage that is quite attractive in the landscape. Vinca loves the heat and will thrive in hot, dry conditions.

Pentas. Another annual with tropical origins, pentas produce large flower heads of many small, star-shaped blooms atop 2-foot-tall plants. Also called "star cluster" because of the flower shape, pentas flourish in heat and humidity and attract butterflies and hummingbirds. Pentas come in a range of soft, warm colors as well as bright reds and deep pinks.

Viola. Close relatives of pansies, violas produce abundant, 1.5-inch, 5-petaled flowers in an amazing array of colors and patterns. Violas are terrific

cool season choices because they flourish in the lower temperatures of spring and autumn. Many violas will survive winter in most areas; if planted in autumn, they will die back and then return to bloom in the spring.

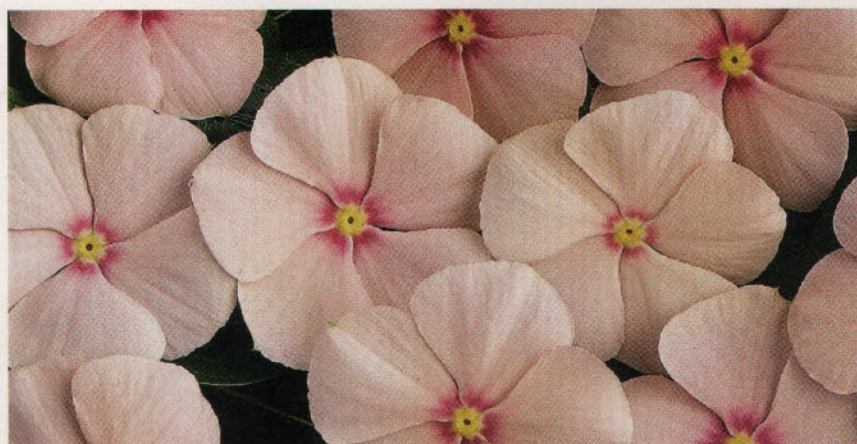
Begonia. Finding great plants for shaded areas can be a challenge, but begonias always rise to the occasion. Fibrous or "wax" begonias are a common sight in many summer gardens; the upright plants have green or bronze foliage and usually display white, pink or red flowers. Tuberous begonias exhibit double or semi-double flowers and are available in a wider color palette.

Ornamental Millet (Pennisetum). Some plants just know how to make an impact, and Purple Majesty ornamental millet is one of those. This breeding breakthrough won the prestigious All-American Selections Gold Medal in 2003 for its amazing garden performance. Purple Majesty grows 3 to 5 feet tall with long leaves and 12-inch, cattail-like flower plumes that attract birds. The plants begin green but turn a gorgeous deep mahogany-purple when planted outside. Purple Majesty makes a great backdrop or centerpiece plant and looks amazing when mass-planted in the landscape.

Marigold. These tough, prolific bloomers are among the boldest and brightest annuals available and look great in beds, borders, and containers. Marigolds are commonly found in sizzling colors like yellow, gold, orange and bronze; there are also many bicolors available that display red or deep burgundy accents. The two most popular types of marigolds are African marigolds, which can grow up to 3 feet tall and produce large, round pom-pom-like flowers, and French marigolds, which are a bit shorter (6 to 18 inches is average) with smaller single or double flowers.

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Jessica Atchison works in the marketing services department at the Ball Horticultural Company.



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