

Annual, biennial or perennial?

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Annuals, such as these cosmos, are varieties that only grow for one season. Once annuals start to flower, they generally do so for an extended period, only stopping when killed by the onset of cold weather in the fall.

Question: As I prepare to plant my vegetable and flower gardens, I get a bit mixed up with the terms annual, biennial and perennial. Will you explain the differences between these terms and perhaps give a few examples?

Answer: Plants are grouped into three kinds of life cycles: 1) annuals grow for one season only, producing seed, then dying; 2) biennials grow vegetative structures (leaves) during the first season and do not produce flowers, fruit or seeds until the second year, after which they die; and 3) perennials have a life cycle of more than two years.

Gardeners know that once a seed germinates, its growth and development depends on its life cycle as well as surrounding environmental factors (temperature, nutrients, light, oxygen and carbon dioxide).

Annuals are varieties that only grow for one season. After the annual plant's growing season, the blooms, leaves, stems and roots will all die. If you want annual varieties every year, you have to plant seeds/seedlings every year. Annual flowers bloom in the year they are started from seed, with many varieties directly sown into the soil.

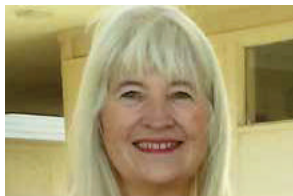
Once annuals start to flower, they generally do so for an extended period, only stopping when killed by the onset of cold weather in the fall. Annuals

are known for their long bloom time. Cosmos, impatiens, marigolds, pansies, snapdragons, sweet peas and zinnias are examples of common annuals that will brighten your garden with a colorful show of blossoms from spring through fall.

The majority of vegetables people plant in their gardens are annuals. Annual vegetable plants include corn, tomatoes, green beans, peas, pumpkins and zucchini.

Biennials are planted one year, grow through the year, overwinter as a plant, then grow on and flower during year two. When flowering is finished, the plants will produce seed before dying. It is advisable to initially plant biennials for two years in a row to enjoy continued flowering year-to-year. During the first year, the plant grows leaves, stems and roots. They will form a short stem and low growing rosette of leaves and stay through the winter during that first year.

They behave like a perennial for the first season, dying back with the regrowth coming from the root. During the second season, the plant will flower, go to seed and then the entire plant will die.



Linda Estep
Ask a Master Gardener

Canterbury bells, foxgloves, forget-me-nots, hollyhock and wallflower are examples of biennials that you may find in an Oregon garden. Biennial vegetables include beets, Brussels sprouts, celery, leeks, parsley, onions and

Swiss chard.

Perennials are plants that grow for more than two years. Every perennial's life span is different – some will continue to grow for decades while others will grow for just a few years. Typically, just the top portions of perennials die back in the winter. They are hardy enough to survive winter's conditions and come back from the same root every year. In the spring, new growth comes from the same root system as the year before producing new leaves, stems, flowers or fruit.

When perennials are grown from seed, blooms will not appear in the first year.

In the second year and in subsequent years, you will see blooms in either the spring or summer. The bloom time of perennials is much shorter than of annuals. Each type of perennial also has a certain bloom time. For example, in a perennial flower garden, if you want spring bloom, plant anemone,

bleeding heart or bellflower. If you desire summer bloom, plant orange or purple coneflower, peony or yarrow. If you want late summer/early fall bloom, plant Shasta daisy.

Perennials are an excellent choice for those who do not want to plant new plants every year. If you are seeking a low-maintenance, yet attractive yard, these plants are a very good choice. Perennials multiply and grow each season. After several years they can be divided and transplanted into new flower beds.

Perennials found in your vegetable garden may include artichokes, asparagus, Jerusalem artichokes (sun chokes), radicchio and rhubarb.

As you plan your garden, keep in mind that when you plant biennials or perennials, you are making a long term commitment. Carefully plan out the location since the plant will be in that spot for quite awhile. Also you will need to tend to these plants throughout the year if you want them to thrive. If you plant all annuals, you start fresh each year.

Do you have a gardening question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners via email at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, by phone at 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg.