



## *A little know-how will color your gardens beautifully*

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ou don't have to be a Master Gardener to enjoy the beauty of a lovely flower garden. If you follow the instructions on the tags of purchased plants, "they will grow big and beautiful," says Lou Manfredini, Ace Hardware's home expert. That includes

noting the light that is necessary for each plant.

"You really have to pay attention to what the plants like, and put them in that environment," he explains.

A plant may require full sun, part sun or full shade, explains Dave Shoemaker, co-owner, D&R Garden Center in Lafayette.

"Pick the tag up, and read it. That is the quickest and easiest way to get knowledge on a particular plant," Shoemaker says. "You can go home, and look it up on the Internet, and you will get a lot more knowledge, but for something a customer sees in the store, and likes, and they might want to buy it right there, that will give them a good idea of what that plant is going to do."

Barb Ruff, plant manager at Bennett's Greenhouse in Lafayette, agrees that an easy way to learn about flowers and plants is to read the tags and follow the directions. As far as figuring out how much sun a particular part of your garden or yard gets, she says it's best to simply observe the sunlight with your own eyes. Tools such as light meters are sold, but they are generally better suited to measure sunlight inside of the house, Ruff explains.

"When looking at your garden, the south and west side of the house generally get good sun, while the north and east side are more shady," she says. A lot of planting is through trial and error, and that includes evaluating the amount of sunlight an area gets.

If you like color, then today's varieties of flowers will give you something to look forward to every late spring and summer.

"Growers are breeding more colors as we speak," Ruff says. The beauty of buying an annual flower is that you can enjoy the color for the whole season, instead of just a few weeks, as is the cycle with many perennials, she explains. ➤➤



One of the most popular annual flowers is the wave petunia, which is a low growing hybrid petunia, that spreads out and “gives you tons of color all summer long,” says Ruff.

A variety of pansy also has the name “wave” in it—the Cool Wave pansy—and it is new to the Norway Gardens greenhouse in Monticello, according to the store’s February 20 newsletter: “It is not an ordinary pansy! Like Wave Petunias, the Cool Wave Pansies are vigorous and are spreaders.” As its

name indicates, these flowers prefer cooler weather, but can be planted in flower beds as a spring groundcover, or in pots or hanging baskets.

A trend in planting is to use containers instead of placing them directly in the soil, Shoemaker says.

“Container plants are easier to take care of, and it’s much easier to do a defined area that way than it is to do your whole yard,” he says. A defined area would be a patio or porch. Particularly with the local drought

conditions of the summer of 2012, potted plants would be easier to grow, and they take less time to tend overall.

An example of a flower that looks good in a container or pot is the Dragon Wing begonia, says Ruff. This annual flower gets very tall and looks excellent in a hanging pot or basket, she says.

For areas that don’t get as much sun, impatiens are a good choice.

“They are pretty much the standard for shade,” says Ruff, and come in

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*"Use color and differences in height to create a very solid palette around the home"*

many varieties.

Pay attention to where your annual flowers were placed this year, and if they don't grow as well as you expected, try a spot with different amounts of sunlight next year for a better result. Another trial-and-error endeavor is in the fertilization, and Manfredini, Shoemaker and Ruff all recommend using some type of fertilization.

"Just any regular garden fertilizer," Ruff says. Manfredini says to wait about a month after the flowers have been planted before using chemical fertilizers.

While annuals are new every year, perennials are still very much in demand, notes Ruff, and they come in unique colors, but the color usually only lasts a few weeks to a month, and then the plant is in a vegetative state, and "you won't get that 'wow' color," she says.

"You still have to take care of them every year, such as watering, weeding and dividing them when they get too wild looking," she says.

One popular perennial is the heuchera, commonly called coral bells, which come in bright oranges and pinks. Hostas, another popular perennial, feature leafy-green foliage, and are a good shade perennial, adds

Ruff.

None of the greenhouses interviewed for this article currently have catalogs to browse, but all have online registration, where you can sign up for free newsletters and other online information. It does help to have an idea of what you are looking for before you go into these garden centers, because once the season gets going in May and June, it's often hard to find a place to park.

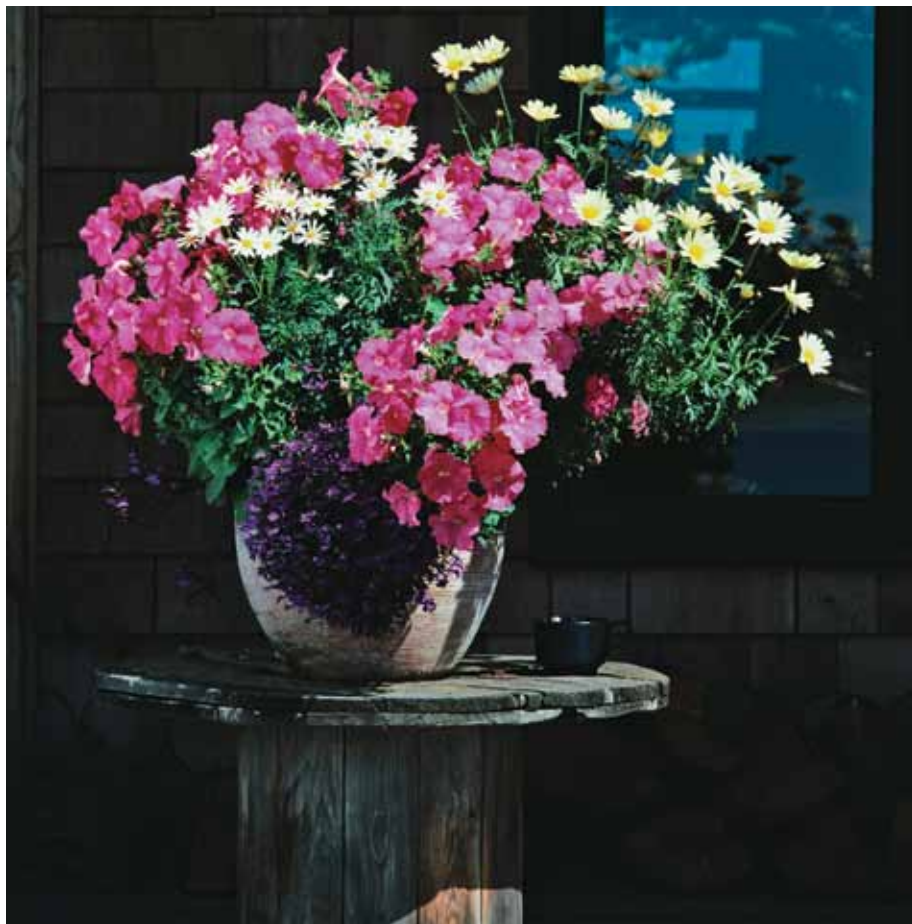
Some sites on the Internet to research flowers, shrubs, and plants are GardenWeb.com, HGTV.com, and just about any large seed company, such as Burpee.com or the Ball seed company, Ballhort.com.

Manfredini says not to worry too much about conformity in a garden because you can have flowers of varying heights and sizes.

"Use color and differences in height to create a very solid palette around the home," he says.

While some types of flowers might be more in fashion now than others, the overall look of your individual garden never goes out of style.

"There aren't any laws in gardening," says Ruff. "It's really what you enjoy looking at." ✽



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