

# Prepare your soil for a beautiful season

By TOM CAVAN  
Herald Special

So small yet so powerful, annuals bring us to our knees in delicate loving care as we bed them out in anticipation of a constant show of colour.

These tender Herbaceous plants will produce beauty far beyond their costs if planted properly.

Those who get discouraged at the cost of Annuals haven't fully understood their nature or purpose in the garden.

Like seeds they are inexpensive when you consider the effort that goes into producing and scheduling them for the consumer.

If you wish to save money collect seeds from mature blossoms of select beauties and store them until next season.

I will be writing an article on seed collecting in late summer when time is ripe.

Be sure to prepare your soil each season. Placing well nurtured Annual in dusty or hard unattended soil runs parallel to dropping a naked human in a desert.

A well prepared bed with amendments of manure rich top soil, peat-moss and bonemeal will run parallel with dropping that human being in an oasis.

Quantities for mixing depend on the status of the existing soil. Dry sandy soil lacks moisture, tension and soil stability.

Soil stability refers to its ability to stay loose and friable allowing good penetration of both air and water without compacting. Clay soils are good for growing but the soil particles are too fine and when it dries it will compact and choke the roots.

The addition of coarse sand and peatmoss will help loosen the soil and help retain moisture. Again quantities depend on soil and location.

A cup of soil retrieved from an 8 inch depth will be sufficient sample to take in for appraisal by a trained eye.

It is important to mix the right amounts of manure, too much can cause excessive leaf and too little flower.

Too much peatmoss will cause the soil to turn acidic, which sometimes is desirable.

An easy rule of thumb is to mix one part existing soil, one part top soil, or part peatmoss and a shovel full of manure if mixing in a wheelbarrow or equivalent pile.

After mixing spread a film of bonemeal over the surface and rake in.

Work your bed to a depth of 12 inches and loosen large clumps. If using garden fertilizer follow directions on the package label or you can over feed.

Don't over crowd Annuals when planting, they will compete for space and this is expensive.

Planting at the proper distance will return a full season of colour.

Never plant during the heat of the day. Always plant when the air is cool. During the heat from noon to 4 p.m. Annuals will transpire and wilt because the roots are not capable of supplying the water.

Thoroughly water after planting and check for water when hot dry weather prevails.

Once established, mulching with co-cobean shells or bark chips will provide moisture retention and protect the soil from hot dry winds, control weeds and gives an attractive frame for your picturesque garden.

**GARDENING TIP:**

10-14 days after planting pinch tips to encourage stronger bushier plants.

—Courtesy Cavan's Garden Centre



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