



Using Annuals in the Layered Garden ... grown from seed, of course

In gardening, the term “layering” can have different interpretations. It might mean building up soil layers using materials such as compost, grass clippings, barn litter (straw and manure mix), and chopped leaves, and then planting into it. It is also a propagation method where branches are bent and pinned to the ground, and slightly wounded to encourage root growth.

In garden design, you use visual layering by strategically positioning plants of varying heights to create an ever-changing, and continually interesting picture. Spring bulbs are the VIPs of the ground layer in the early season. Throughout the summer, we depend on annual flowers and vegetables to play that significant role, plus they can add interest to the middle-layer garden. By taking advantage of niches in your yard—spaces vacated by bulbs gone dormant, between-the-shrubs areas, or garden edges—you can layer in season-long color, and utility as well!

So tuck a few flowers, colorful vegetables, and herbs into the crevices of your garden to please your eye, your palate, and the pollinators in your yard!



See-through Plants for Front, Middle, or Back of the Garden

Sometimes all it takes to elevate an ordinary garden to one of extraordinary interest and beauty are a few exclamation points, that is, plants that will unite the garden with a repeated pattern while not screaming “Look at me!” These might be sturdy see-through plants that dance above the garden, or they might be statuesque focal points. Either way, they bring a garden alive.



Nicotiana 'Whisper' series and Gomphrena 'Fireworks' rise above the garden, while not blocking the view.

Brazilian verbena (*Verbena bonariensis*), a butterfly favorite, grows to about 4 feet tall.

Dill lights up the garden with chartreuse blooms, and attracts pollinators.

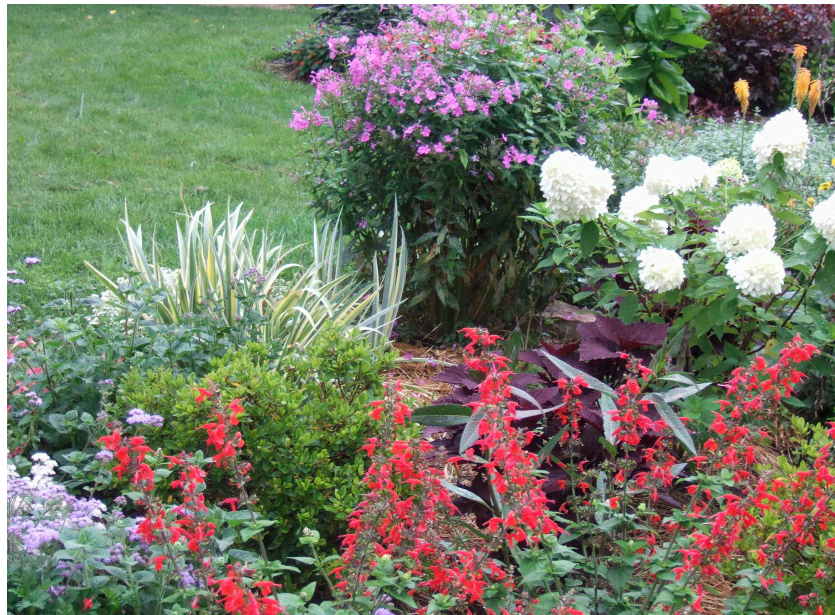
Tropical asclepias (*Asclepias curassavica*), 3 feet in height, is a favorite of monarch butterflies.

Flowering tobacco (*Nicotiana* sp.) is known for its nighttime fragrance.

Cosmos 'Bright Lights', blooms in orange and gold, and can be sown directly in the garden.

Color Spotting the Garden

Many gardeners shy away from strong colors—red, in particular—for fear that it will be too dominant. One way to unite a garden picture, while not overwhelming it with hot or very dark colors, is to introduce bursts of color. Here are a few candidates for color spotting:



Salvia 'Summer Jewel Red' complements purples and whites.

Red salvias, such as 'Lady in Red' and 'Summer Jewel', attract hummingbirds.

Ruby chard is a classic ornamental edible. Harvest the outside leaves.

Ornamental pepper 'Black Pearl' has dark foliage, and fruits that turn red in late summer.

Coleus varieties such as 'Chocolate Mint' and the 'Versa' series can take the sun.

Canna 'South Pacific Scarlet', and a few others, can be grown from seed.

Along the Garden Path

Low-growing flowers that soften edges add romance to a garden. These plants can also take advantage of situations offered by, for example, the sheltered underside of leggy shrubs. Tuck in a patch of lettuce, a parsley plant, or a clump of sweet alyssum, and your reward will be a tasty salad ingredient, or the fragrance of sweet honey. It's a win-win.



White sweet alyssum and yellow creeping zinnia (*Sanvitalia procumbens*) line the garden edge.

Sweet alyssum attracts beneficial insects such as syrphid flies, and perfumes the night air.

Lettuce makes a beautiful edging plant in spring and fall.

Parsley, particularly the triple curled type, is attractive as well as tasty.

Creeping Zinnia (*Sanvitalia*) flowers look like miniature sunflowers.

Chervil will make itself at home in the moist dappled shade of a tall shrub.

The Middle Ground

There's no reason for an expanse of mulch in between garden shrubs, not when there are carefree annual flowers that can take their place. Annual flowers can create a river of color that runs brightly through a garden. This technique is especially effective if the same bedding plant is used throughout.



'Profusion' zinnia and *Alternanthera* mix it up.

Begonias are tough, drought-tolerant, and colorful all summer long.

Zinnia 'Profusion' and 'Zahara' series are mildew resistant, and attract butterflies.

Ageratum, a butterfly favorite, is ignored by deer.

Melampodium will cover an area with fresh green and gold all summer.

New Guinea impatiens offer clean foliage and attractive flowers in partial shade.

The Quick Fix

Go-anywhere Pots

Planting containers of colorful annual flowers and edibles—marigolds, begonias, peppers, and more—is an easy way to ensure that your garden stays fresh and interesting in all seasons.

