



Garden q & a
STEPHEN BROWN

Annuals and Perennials are Different

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Question: For 10 years we have been planting flowers and shrubs in a 15' x 8' area that we fertilize on a regular basis. The plot is composed mainly of fill dirt and potting soil. The annuals do fairly well but the perennials just don't do anything. We live in a community that has a sprinkler system that keeps the area moist. Please, can you help us?

- Wendy W., e-mail

Answer: Annuals have short lives and most will usually expire within six months. Perennials on the other hand have the ability to thrive for many years. Keeping the soil moist may be the problem. While moist soils may be fine for the selected annuals it could be a dilemma for the chosen perennials. That is because water mold fungi are a natural soil composition. The fungi invade the roots of plants and sometimes move upward into the stems and leaves. The shorter life-span of the annuals could mean less time for these fungi to negatively affect their growth. Given the longer lives of perennials, odds are the fungi will have sufficient time to invade and debilitate these plants. This is one reason why plants of significantly different water requirements should not be planted together. Many cultivated annuals demand more water than perennials. Water needs of plants are one of nature's ways of creating plant ecosystems. Here are several options: Plant the plot with all annuals of equal water requirements; plant the plot with all perennials of similar water needs; switch to perennials that are tolerant of moist soils; reduce irrigation frequency and switch to annuals that are more drought resistant. However, in an era of mandated water restriction, the movement should be towards more drought tolerant plants. At all times, the goal should be to group plants together that are compatible with each other. Compatibility includes such things as soils, water, light, nutritional requirements, speed of growth, and pest tolerance.

Stephen Brown is a horticulture agent with the Lee County Extension Service. Submit questions by calling the horticulture desk at 533-7504 between 9 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. or by e-mailing brownsh@leegov.com. Visit his web page at <http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/GardenHome.shtml> "Garden Doctor" video clips <http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/Hort/Video.shtml> and flowering trees information at http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/Hort/GardenPubsA_Z.shtml