

## Quick Tips for Seasonal Color Success

It's that time of year again, it happens every Spring. We get a few warm days and your phone starts ringing with clients wanting to know when they can expect their flowers to be changed out. With over twenty years growing, selling, and installing seasonal color; I have seen just about every way an annual can be killed. Here are the three most common issues I see:

### **Too Early.**

It's hard to tell a client they have to wait, but remember this - April in the South can have some wild temperature swings. Soil temperatures are rising but are still not yet optimal. Your annuals really won't start growing and flourishing until nighttime temperatures and soil temperatures stabilize. Also, you are bringing tender plant material from the controlled environments of greenhouses where they are accustomed to the stabilized ecosystem. By taking them out of the greenhouses too early, you are subjecting them to the mood swings of Mother Nature. Sometimes you can get away with it and sometimes you have to replant, which ends up costing you time and money. It is also important to remember that the higher heat tolerance your plant has, the longer you should refrain from planting it so early. These higher heat tolerant plants include Vinca, Caladiums, and Ipomea. Planting these types of plants in May is a good target for best performance.

### **Too Deep.**

When out troubleshooting issues for landscapers, I see this way too often. I know it's hard to keep an eye on all of your crews, and I understand staffing issues and the push to make all of your clients happy, but this issue right here is a biggie. Improper planting height of burying the plant and stem in mulch can destroy the chance of success for a planting exponentially. Spending some time with the seasonal color crew can go a long way. Make sure it is clear to them the risks of planting the annuals improperly. If an error was made when planting, I personally would rather see bedding plants set on the high side. Having them planted a little high leads to less problems down the road than if buried too deep. If your client requires mulch, a lighter covering of mulch is best in flower beds. It is necessary to watch the application of mulches as you want to be sure that the material is not choking out the plants. Having too much mulch on the stems is a quick way to kill an annual bed of Vinca among many other warm seasoned annuals.

### **Too Wet.**

So many annuals I see in consultations are simply victims of drowning. We are dealing with young material in transitional temperatures this time of year. Set your watering systems, or ask your crews to, so that watering is thorough and allows plants to dry out between watering intervals. You will end up with stronger and healthier plants since the roots of the young plants are being forced to stretch and look for water and nutrients instead of providing them with excess that is easily available. Overwatering promotes an environment for plants that disease thrives in, and weak plants are a target for pests and disease. The early weeks after planting are critical in building plant health that lasts all season. As always, it will eventually get hotter here as the plants mature - turn up the water then but give them a fighting chance to begin with.

These are just three of the most common issues I see. Fertility and material choices are also huge issues. Being armed with knowledge and addressing issues around these topics should have you well on your way to seasonal color success.

Mark McGrady  
Carolina Colorscapes  
Colorscapes Supply Company