

## Summer Color for Central Florida Yards

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The intense heat and humidity of Florida summers can be a difficult challenge for gardeners. Picking out the right plants to handle these tough conditions will help you enjoy a colorful yard, patio, or balcony all summer long. This guide highlights plants that will perform in all conditions this season (see Table 1).

Before purchasing plants, decide on the best location for your flowers. Whether in large pots on your porch or balcony, or planted in flower beds around your yard, these sites should be chosen beforehand so that you can buy the appropriate number of plants. Fresh potting mix should be added to containers and soil in flower beds should be well cultivated and amended if necessary. It may be helpful to think about the colors that will look best next to your home or in the pots you've chosen.

**Watering** your plants after planting will be very important. Thoroughly soaking the flower beds or pots will eliminate air pockets and start growth and root establishment. Regular watering will keep the plants growing well and as seasonal rains begin, it may eliminate the need for additional waterings. **Fertilizing** with a slow-release fertilizer will help provide nutrients throughout the season, and water soluble fertilizers can also be applied on a more frequent basis to encourage healthy growth. **Weeding** may also be necessary to help keep plants vigorous. Small weeds are easier and less damaging to remove than large weeds, so staying on top of this will reward your efforts. **Pruning** your plants can include both pinching and deadheading: pinching is a light pruning that will reduce the size of the plant and encourage more branching, deadheading removes spent blossoms and helps the plant to focus energy into creating more flowers rather than seeds.



Figure 2. *Angelonia*



Figure 1. *Caladium*

For plants that will grow in the shade and provide color all summer long, caladiums offer many choices for size, shape, and color (Figure 1). These can be purchased as bulbs to be planted directly in the soil, or as bedding plants that are ready for an instant splash of color in your landscape. Persian shield, impatiens, and crossandra are all great plants for shady areas. Sunny areas have lots of options for flowers that will last for months as well. Coleus, pentas, and angelonia are available in many different shades and colors that will complement your garden (Figure 2).

**Table 1: Annuals Flowers for Summer Color in Central Florida**

| Common Name                                | Sun Exposure  | Earliest Planting | Typical Removal | Spacing (inches) | Typical Colors           |
|--|---|-------------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| Angelonia                                  |    | March             | December        | 14-18            | Purple, White            |
| Begonia                                    |     | February          | November        | 12-14            | Red, Pink, White         |
| Blue Daze                                  |    | February          | November        | 12               | Blue                     |
| Caladium                                   |     | March             | September       | 12-18            | Red, Pink, White         |
| Canna                                      |     | May               | First frost     | 12-14            | Red, Orange, Yellow      |
| Celosia                                    |     | March             | When declining  | 10-12            | Red, Orange, Yellow      |
| Coleus                                     |    | March             | November        | 18-24            | Many                     |
| Crossandra                                 |    | April             | November        | 10-12            | Orange, Yellow           |
| Euphorbia 'Diamond Frost', 'Hip Hop', etc. |     | March             | When declining  | 15               | White                    |
| Gailardia                                  |     | March             | August          | 12-18            | Orange, Yellow           |
| Gomphrena                                  |     | February          | September       | 12               | Red, Pink, White         |
| Impatiens                                  |     | March             | December        | 12-18            | Many                     |
| Iresine or Blood Leaf                      |     | March             | First Frost     | 12-18            | Yellow, Pink             |
| Melampodium                                |     | February          | October         | 12-18            | Yellow                   |
| Moss Rose or Portulaca                     |    | March             | November        | 10-12            | Many                     |
| New Guinea Impatiens                       |    | March             | November        | 30               | Many                     |
| Ornamental Pepper                          |     | March             | October         | 8-10             | Red, Purple              |
| Ornamental Sweet Potato                    |     | March             | First frost     | 18-24            | Lime green, Purple, Pink |
| Pentas                                     |     | March             | December        | 18-30            | Red, Pink, White         |
| Persian Shield                             |     | March             | December        | 24-36            | Purple                   |
| Salvia                                     |     | March             | June            | 8-12             | Red, Purple, White       |
| Torenia                                    |    | March             | November        | 12-18            | Many                     |
| Tropical Sage                              |     | February          | December        | 12-16            | Blue, Red, Purple        |
| Vinca                                      |     | May               | November        | 12               | Red, Pink, White         |
| Zinnia                                     |    | March             | September       | 12-15            | Many                     |

 Full Sun     Partial Sun/Partial Shade     Full Shade

Sun Exposures shown are in order of preference. For example,   would show that a plant prefers partial shade but would still grow well in full sun.