

# FLOWER Power

By Jim VanSlyke, Commercial and Residential Landscape Designer

Summer annuals are the powerhouses of the home garden and building entrances. The reason they perform so well is that they have to germinate, grow, flower, set seed and die all in one season (thus the term annuals). They can be used to fill in gaps in the perennial border, trail over a large wall, and even combine with twigs and ornamental perennials or shrubs in a container.

When choosing summer annuals you must consider height and light. Use the taller plants in the center or rear of the beds or containers and smaller and trailing plants in the front. And make sure that the plant you choose can handle the light conditions for the area. Plant according to the distances shown on the tag when growing annuals in beds (or even closer sometimes because the growing season is so short). However, you should plant them closer together when in containers for a real show.



Watering is critical for good growth and flower production. Most annuals like to be kept moist but not wet. Containers will require much more water, especially later in the season, as the roots develop and the soil begins to lose some water holding capacity. Also remember that it is better to water less frequently and deeper than it is to water more frequently and shallow. And, try and keep the water off of the leaves. It'll keep diseases down if you do. Also make sure that there is adequate drainage so that the soil can dry out a little between waterings.

Additional fertilizer is also important because annuals are big feeders. Fish emulsion and diluted liquid fertilizers used once a week are a great way to keep your annuals looking great all summer. However, I realize that most people don't want to have to remember to do that. So, you can use a slow release granular fertilizer mixed right into the bed or container. But even those will stop working later in the season.

If you're looking for great performers stick to the tried and true plants such as Blue Horizon ageratum, Olympia begonia, Montego Snapdragon, Super Bells Calibrachoa, Fresh Look and New Look Celosia, Blitz and Elfin Impatiens, Sweet Potato Vine, Silver Dust Dusty Miller, Dreams and Wave Petunias, Victoria Blue Salvia, Coleus and Marigolds. Some other more unusual but beautiful and easy-to-grow annuals that you might want to try are Blazin Rose Iresine, Purple Knight Alternanthera, Sonata Cosmos, Fireworks Fountain Grass, Imperial Blue Plumbago and Rustic Dwarf Rudbeckia.

Annuals usually arrive by the beginning of May but be sure to check out the long-range forecast if you're going to plant that early because we can get a frost until May 15th.

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# LAWN RANGER

## Newsletter

SPRING 2010  
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## A PEEK AT THIS EDITION'S ARTICLES



JOE'S  
TRAVEL  
ADVENTURE



RAIN  
GARDENS



WATER  
MANAGEMENT



FLOWER  
POWER

Ranked in the top 150 Grounds Management companies in the U.S. by *Landscape Magazine* and in the top 100 Snow & Ice Management Companies in the U.S. by *Snow Magazine*.

# Mother Teresa A CAR & Me

CALCUTTA, INDIA

India is a country that you either love or hate. When people ask me about it, I usually respond that it is a place I love to hate. Having spent nearly a half year there, it still perplexes me. A casual walk down the street in India reveals more experiences than a year of walking the streets in Minneapolis. It has such contrasts; riches and poverty, array of religions, chaos and frustrations, joy, happiness, and misery. Every time I go to India, I can't wait to leave. Once home, I can't wait to go back.

One particular day stands out as one I'll never forget. It was early in the morning and I needed to go to the train station to get a ticket for the next day. The first sight of the day was an old man lying in the gutter dying and everyone around was ignoring him. Getting closer to the station there were masses of people huddled together on the street and families that had come to Calcutta with no money and nowhere to go. As I entered the station, I saw another man that had been stripped of his clothing during the night. He was looking for newspapers to cover up. I offered him money, but he was too embarrassed and proud to take it. I have seen a lot of poverty in my time, but this day was more than I could handle. The strange thing about poverty is that it does not always mean unhappiness. In fact, some of the poorest people where I have traveled seemed to be the happiest. Calcutta is often referred to as "The City of Joy," but this day was different because all I was seeing was misery. This was beyond my ability to handle and I just wanted to escape from it all.

What I did next is something I'm not proud of. I decided to spend the day at one of the fanciest hotels in Calcutta to try to ignore the things I had seen that morning. This is something that I never do. Staying in fancy, over-the-top hotels has never been part of my travel experiences. At the end of the day, after eating well and sitting by the pool, it was time to go back to the hotel that I was actually staying in. I was full of guilt and didn't feel good about myself.

As I walked down the street in an angry trance, a hand pulled me back and I looked up to discover that Mother Teresa's car had nearly hit me as it traveled down the road. Mother Teresa looked at me from inside the car, smiled that I was OK, and either blessed me or made the sign of the cross. I was in shock! At that moment everyone on the street that saw her had a smile on their face. Strangers wanted to shake my hand. All of a sudden I felt like I was on cloud nine. I felt much better, as did everyone else on the street. Indeed, Calcutta is the City of Joy.

## TRAVEL ADVENTURES

Many of you are always asking about my trips so this is one of many travel adventures to be told in the Lawn Ranger Newsletter.

Since I was a teenager I have traveled on a shoe string budget, backpacking all over the world for sometimes up to a year, mostly in third world countries.

- Joe Unger,  
Owner of Lawn Ranger, Inc.

# Rain Gardens...

## YOUR OWN PERSONAL WATER QUALITY SYSTEM

By Sanford J. Sackter, Commercial Landscape Development

Bioretention ponds, infiltration basins, stormwater management areas—"a rose by any other name..." No matter what you call them, they are all basically Rain Gardens. Rain Gardens are simple by design: a planted depression that allows rainwater runoff from impervious (hard surfaces) like roofs, driveways, walkways, to be absorbed into the groundwater table or slowed down enough while microorganisms and bacteria remove pollutants before moving into the stormwater drainage system. In effect rain gardens let gravity do most of the work.

Living in Minnesota, most of us do not look at fresh water in the same way as other parts of the United States. But, if you have ever traveled to Miami Beach and filled up a sink to wash your face, you may have noticed a slight brownish tinge to the water, or you may have family or friends in Nebraska or South Dakota who complain about the coming shortage of water because the Ogallala aquifer (which supplies 30% of the nation's ground water used for agricultural irrigation) is rapidly being depleted. "So?" you say..." What does all this have to do with us back here in the "Land of 10,000 Lakes" where there is an ample supply of fresh, clean water for everyone for years to come?"

The answer is "plenty." The quality of water, our precious Minnesota resource we all once took for granted, is in jeopardy much like the rest of the United States. Litter, animal waste, lawn chemicals, automobile fluids and everything else on the street is carried with this rain water into the pipes and then into the lake. This causes erosion, water pollution, flooding and diminishes the groundwater supply. Building a rain garden on your property will allow rainwater runoff from impervious surfaces the opportunity to be absorbed. Rain Garden plantings take up water flowing into the Rain Garden, in turn reducing rain runoff. These gardens can cut down on the amount of pollution reaching lakes and streams by up to 30%.

The best location is as close to the runoff source as practical. Rain gardens planted between you and your neighbor can channel runoff from both properties, while simultaneously acting as a living fence between neighbors.



There is no standard size for a rain garden. One formula recommends an area about 5% to 7% of the drainage area that the rain garden is intended to receive runoff from. Rainwater gardens installed in several Twin Cities municipalities range in size from: 8 ft. by 16 ft. to 12 ft. by 24 ft.

Generally a Rain Garden does not need to be more than 12" deep. It is best to construct a relatively flat bottom to the basin to allow as much area for water infiltration as possible, with modest side slopes that will not erode.

Make sure you select plants that can tolerate the extremes of wet soils and very dry periods for your rain garden. Native plants work best since they are best adapted to the local climate and, once established, seldom need watering or fertilizing. Many are deep rooted, which enables them to tolerate drought. Native plants are attractive to many beneficial insects and provide habitats for wildlife, especially birds. Also, when selecting plants, keep in mind whether your Rain Garden is located in full sun or shade. Gardens on high-traffic streets should include plants that tolerate de-icing salts. And remember, although native plants are low maintenance, they still require routine landscape maintenance: weeding, pruning, plant replacement, mulching, occasional supplemental watering, and seasonal cleanout to remove sediment and debris accumulation.

In essence, Rain Gardens improve water quality by filtering run-off, provide localized flood control, can be designed to be aesthetically pleasing, and provide interesting landscape opportunities. They also encourage wildlife and biodiversity, tie communities and their surrounding environments together in attractive and environmentally advantageous ways, and provide partial solutions to important environmental problems that affect us all.

## WATER CONSERVATION

By Jim Mold, Irrigation Manager

As we start our irrigation systems for the summer we should always look for ways to conserve water.

Ways for us to do this are:

- Make sure we have a rain sensor and it works properly.
- Check the settings on the controller to make sure each zone has the proper run times.
- Install a new battery for the controller if one was not replaced in the Spring.

By not over watering turf, the grass and the improved root system will be able to handle the drought conditions that will occur in the next couple of months.



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