

Choose bedding plants with care

By Marge Alpern
special writer

Bedding plants are ready to go the moment you buy them. They are programmed to bloom from day one until the first kills them.

Because our growing season is short, many Michigan gardeners refrain from starting their plants from seed and get a jump on nature by planting seedlings. This way, there is immediate landscaping, more assured success and a longer period of flowering.

Before heading out to the garden center to buy your bedding plants, it is advisable to hoe the flower bed. Spread in some compost, manure or fertilizer such as 5-10-5. Rake the area until it is relatively smooth.

The stand back, visualize, plan, dream a little and decide what you need, what you want and what will grow in each area of your garden. Be realistic.

SHOP WITH a list in hand. There are many beautiful varieties to tempt you. But if your garden is in full sun, the gorgeous non-stop begonias simply won't do.

Select the appropriate plants carefully. Read the labels, which provide a great deal of helpful information.

Check to see if the plants require sun or shade will be six inches or 36 inches tall and are the color you want. Avoid the tall, spindly plant in favor of low, full ones.

Try to see a representative flower of the plants you are considering, but then buy a flat that hasn't yet started to bloom.

GARDENERS — EVEN CASUAL weekend gardeners — are now taking the whole process of selection very seriously. They are aware that there are dozens of varieties.

A marigold isn't just a marigold, it's Lemon Drop at 6-10 inches, Inca Gold at 16-18 inches or Doublebon at 30-36 inches.

There are many variations of all of the popular annuals, and not just the sophisticated gardener is "shopping the labels."

Once you have made your purchases, give the plants plenty of tender loving care. They are very young and need it.

This care begins when you put them in the car. Cooking in the trunk is sure death, so go directly home and place the plants in a shady, protected spot. Mist them lightly and water them well.

Plant the seedlings as soon as possible. Get them off to a good start by fertilizing the entire flat with a very dilute solution of Miracle-Gro, Rapid-Gro or Ortho's Upstart.

Watering the entire flat thoroughly is an easy way to full saturate the roots. Allow the flat to sit for a while before lifting out the individual plants. If they are too wet, they'll pull away from the soil and come out barerooted.

If there is a dense root mass, pinch away about a quarter of an inch, or at least disturb the tight rootball to stimulate outward growth.

POP THE SEEDLING into a comfortable-size hole — not too small — and tuck it in firmly. Be sure the roots are wet and the plant is upright. If possible, plant on an overcast day.

If you must plant on a sunny day, at least wait until late afternoon and then as a precaution, cover the plants for 24 hours. Shade them with an inverted pot or a board elevated by bricks, something to shield them from the sun.

In a day or two, the plants will overcome the stress of transplanting and re-establish themselves. As soon as the first terminal bud appears, remove it.

You'll never miss it, and this is the best way to avoid a spindly one-flower disappointment, for the plant will quickly branch out and produce a handsome, round bouquet with many flowers. During the summer, water, fertilize and remove the dead blossoms and you will be in business until the frost.

The annuals we buy were bred for success, and many are the result of competitive breeding by

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the major seed companies. In 27 vegetable and 32 flower proving or testing grounds across North America, seeds from the major companies are planted with code identification and thereby tested in a variety of climatic conditions. This determines which seeds will be given the All-American Selection Award for the year.

In 1978, MICHIGAN State University was chosen as one of the trial gardens for this process. On a visit to these display gardens, you can see the

entries of 30-40 seed companies.

For example, there are dozens of marigolds in one area. They are grouped by height, but there are no names displayed, just code numbers for the variety and for the company.

The entries are the result of much research and hybridizing. The visitor can readily see and compare the performance of the different entries.

At the peak of the season, an impressive list of judges from industry, universities and botanical gardens make the selection in all of the gardens. The four criteria by which they judge are disease resistance, early bloom or yield, uniformity, and improved flower color or vegetable flavor.

I suggest you look for the red, white and blue shield emblem of the All-American Selection and ask for these plants.

Since 1933, we gardeners have benefited from this preselection process. This year, ju st one flower was named. It is cosmos, "Sunny Red," which is described as easy to grow, dwarf and heat tolerant.

A corn, "How Sweet It Is," and okra, "Blondy," were the vegetable winners.

The 1985 winners were celosia, "Century Mixed," gazania, "Mini-Star Tangerine," geranium "PL," "Rose Diamond," verbena, "Trinidad," and zinnia, "Yellow Marvel." They are all worth a try.

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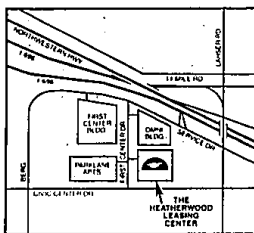
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Troy Orchestra plans pops concert

The Troy Community Orchestra, Joan G. Bernat, music director, will give a pops concert at 8 p.m. Friday, June 6, at the Troy Community Center, 520 W. Big Beaver, Troy. Seating will be cabaret-style and refreshments will be served.

Tickets are \$3 for adults, \$2 for

seniors and students and \$5 per family if bought in advance. Add \$1 if purchased at the door. Address ticket requests, with check or money order payable to TCO, to TCO, Box 1222, Troy, 48069. For information, call 588-6677 or 689-6798.

Festival auditions set

Auditions for the 1986 Michigan Renaissance Festival will be 7-10 p.m. Monday, June 2, at University of Detroit Architecture Building and at the Festival site in Holly 1-4 p.m. Sunday, June 15.

For information, call or write the Festival office, 700 E. Maple, Birmingham, 48011, 645-9640, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday-Friday.

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Handbell choirs giving concert

By Corinne Abalt
staff writer

What musical instrument can be as small as a softball or as large as a bowling ball? Give up? A handbell.

The smallest weighs four ounces; the biggest weigh 16 pounds. And the handbell choir members who pick up those 16-pounders many times during a concert know where their muscles are.

The three handbell choirs of Orchard Lake Community Church, 5171 Commerce Road, Orchard Lake, will give their annual Festival of Handbells at 7:30 p.m. Sunday.

The choirs are the Chapel Bells, directed by June Harting, the Morning Bells, under Donna Berry, and the Bell Cantos, directed by Kim Bishop. Bell Cantos members sing while playing the bells.

Harting, an instrumental music teacher, said handbells are a lot more difficult than many other instruments. "People have to have a very fine sense of rhythm."

THE CHOIRS, which range from 10-14 musicians, can play 30 notes, Harting said. The musicians play from two to six bells each. That means they are all by themselves without other players in the section to depend on follow.

The choirs play a wide variety of music on a set of 64 Schulermerich English handbells with more than a five-octave range.

A collection will be taken, and refreshments will be served at this final concert of this year's Orchard Lake Music Series.

Announcing antique show

The Christ Church Grosse Pointe Antiques Show will be held 7-10 p.m. Friday, May 30, (champagne preview), 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday, May 31, and noon to 6 p.m. Sunday, June 1. Advance reservations are required for the champagne preview supper. Gold angel patrons, \$50 per person, will be admitted 7-10 p.m. and silver angel patrons, \$25 per person, will be admitted 7-10 p.m.

The show will be held at Grosse Pointe South High School Gymnasium, 11 Grosse Pointe Boulevard, Grosse Pointe Farms.