

Annuals for Nebraska Landscapes II. Foliage, Grasses, Fruit and Vines

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This NebGuide describes those annual foliage, grasses, fruits and vines that can be grown in Nebraska for use by the home gardener in landscape design.

While most annual plants for Nebraska landscapes are grown for their flowers, some can be grown for their foliage, fruit and trailing growth habit. Like the annuals grown for their colorful flowers, these other annuals can be used in beds, borders, rock gardens, window boxes, hanging baskets and containers. Annuals used for their foliage contribute texture, form, size and mass characteristics to the overall effect.

Herbs such as basil, sage and fennel are often used in landscape designs for their foliage and fragrance rather than their flowers. Ornamental grasses and grass-like plants such as ornamental corn, millet and sedge can be planted as annuals.

Grasses are usually planted as perennials but several annual grasses are available for Nebraska landscapes. Vegetables, such as peppers, make excellent landscape annuals. Additional maintenance on this group of annuals may be required, such as occasional trimming and harvesting fruit. Irrigation and fertilization requirements for annual plants, especially during initial establishment, should also be considered in light of maintenance commitments.

When designing with all annuals, consider site conditions and the preferred growing requirements. Evaluate the planting site's sun exposure, wind patterns, water requirements, soil type and fertility, and then choose plants that will perform in these conditions.

The following list of plants contains suggestions for annuals that are often grown for landscape traits other than their flowers.

Common Name(s)	Botanical Name	Site	Height	Flower/Foliage	Color Comments
Annuals for Foliage					
Asparagus Fern	<i>Asparagus officinalis</i> var. <i>pseudoscabar</i>	Sun	48-60"	White	Grown for airy foliage, small white flowers
Cabbage, Ornamental; Flowering Cabbage; Flowering Kale	<i>Brassica oleracea</i>	Sun	12-24"	Purple, pink, white, green, red, blue-green	Biennial grown as an annual, grown for foliage, best in fall, control cabbage looper and cabbage worm
Caladium	<i>Caladium bicolor</i>	Shade, part shade	12-24"	Greens, reds, pinks, white foliage	Planted outside as a tuber in early summer, dig and store tubers for winter
Calico Plant 'Purple Knight'	<i>Alternanthera dentata</i>	Sun, part shade	6-9"	Burgundy foliage	Trailing
Castor Oil Plant; Castor Bean	<i>Ricinus communis</i>	Sun	120"	Red; foliage is also red	Deeply lobed leaves, highly toxic, grown for foliage
Coleus	<i>Coleus x hybridus</i>	Part shade	12-24"	Green, purple, red, variegated foliage	Grown for foliage, easily propagated by cuttings, remove flower spikes
Coleus, Giant Exhibition	<i>Coleus x blumei</i>	Shade, part shade	12-16"	Assorted foliage	Prefers moist, well-drained soils

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Dusty-Miller	<i>Senecio cineraria</i>	Sun	12-18"	Gray foliage	Excellent edging plant, grown for foliage, tolerates drought, remove flowers that develop
Geranium, Scented	<i>Pelargonium x hybrida</i>	Sun	10-18"	White, green	Grown for their scented foliage, good house plants
Hibiscus 'Red Shield'	<i>Hibiscus acetosella</i>	Sun	48-60"	Red, white, pink	Rarely blooms, grown for deep red maple-like leaves
Iresine	<i>Iresine herbstii</i>	Sun, part shade	12-18"	White	Inconspicuous flowers, bronze-green, burgundy, variegated foliage
Kochia; Burning Bush; Summer Cypress	<i>Kochia scoparia</i> var. <i>tricophylla</i>	Sun	12-30"	Green foliage changes to red in the fall	Hedge, border, accent, grown for foliage, upright bush form
Millet, Purple 'Purple Majesty'	<i>Pennisetum glaucum</i>	Sun	48-60"	Purple	A vertical plant in the grass family, purple foliage and seed heads
Polka Dot Plant	<i>Hypoestes phyllostachya</i>	Sun	6"	Assorted	Foliage has red, pink or white markings, keep soil slightly moist
Swiss Chard	<i>Beta vulgaris</i>	Sun, part shade	12-18"	Assorted	Popular cultivar is 'Bright Lights', bright foliage colors, an edible ornamental
Taro; Elephant Ears	<i>Colocasia esculenta</i>	Part shade	18-30"	Pale green	Produces heart-shaped, large leaves, green to purple, container suited, moist soils, propagate by tubers

Annual Herbs

Basil	<i>Ocimum basilicum</i>	Sun	12-18"	White flowers	Grown for an array of foliage types
Fennel, Bronze	<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i>	Sun, part shade	48-60"	Yellow flowers	Attracts butterflies, remove old flowers to promote flowering, licorice-scented, reseeds aggressively
Fernleaf Dill	<i>Anethum graveolens</i>	Sun	24-36"	Yellow foliage	Small flowers on umbrella-like heads, attracts butterflies
Oregano	<i>Origanum rotundifolium</i>	Sun, part shade	6-12"	Violet, white, cream, purple	Aromatic, trailing or vining form
Rosemary	<i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>	Sun	15-30"	Pink, blue	Semi-prostrate, scented foliage, herb
Sage, Garden	<i>Salvia officinalis</i>	Sun	9-18"	Blue, lilac, white	Aromatic, gray-green or multi-colored leaves, leaves rough

Annual Ornamental Grasses

Bunny Tails; Hare's Tail Grass	<i>Lagurus ovatus</i>	Sun	12-18"	Cream/tan	Soft, fur-like flower heads, heads can be dried and colored
Fiberoptic Grass 'Live Wire'	<i>Isolepis cernua</i>	Sun	6-24"	Silvery	A sedge, flower heads on end of green stems, moist conditions
Fountain Grass, Purple	<i>Pennisetum setaceum</i>	Sun	48-60"	Red foliage	Propagated by division, not winter-hardy
Lemon Grass	<i>Cymbopogon citratus</i>	Sun, light shade	20-36"	Non-flowering	Uniform moisture, strongly scented leaves
Pony Tails, Mexican Feather Grass	<i>Stipa tenuissima</i>	Sun	18-30"	Tan	Delicate, fine, flexible, bright-green leaves
Ruby Grass; Pink Paintbrush	<i>Melinis nervigulumis</i>	Sun	8-18"	Ruby-pink	Blue-green foliage that turns purple-red in the fall, with 3-4" ruby-red blooms

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<i>Annuals for Fruit</i>					
Corn, Ornamental	<i>Zea mays</i>	Sun	3-7'	Husk green to burgundy	Grown for stalk, husk and leaf colors, also for kernel color(s)
Pepper, Ornamental	<i>Capsicum annuum</i>	Sun	12-25"	Fruit, red, black, yellow, orange, purple	Grown for colorful fruit, some cultivars have colorful foliage
<i>Annual Vines</i>					
Black-eyed Susan Vine	<i>Thunbergia alata</i>	Sun, part shade	Vine	Red, orange, yellow, white	Suitable for growing indoors
Cardinal Climber	<i>Ipomoea multifida</i>	Sun	Vine	Red	Deeply fringed foliage, attracts humming-birds
Licorice Plant	<i>Helichrysum petiolatum</i>	Sun	9-12"	White, chartreuse or silver foliage	Trailing plant for use in hanging container, everlasting, fuzzy, foliage use
Mandevilla	<i>Mandevilla x</i>	Sun, part shade	Vine	Pink	Leathery, dark green leaves, used as an indoor plant, container plant
Moon Flower Vine	<i>Ipomoea alba</i>	Sun, part shade	Vine	White	Flowers open at night, funnel shaped, fragrant
Morning Glory	<i>Ipomoea spp.</i>	Sun	+72"	White, pink, red, blue, purple	Screens, trellis plant, soak seed overnight before planting, vining plant, tolerant of dry soils, readily self-seeds
Scarlet Runner Bean	<i>Phaseolus coccineus</i>	Sun	Vine	Red	Support with trellis or string, colorful seeds
Silver Pony-foot	<i>Dichondra argentea</i>	Sun	6", trailing	Pale green, silver foliage	Groundcover, silver-gray foliage, drought tolerant
Sweet Pea	<i>Lathyrus odoratus</i>	Part shade	18-60"	White, purple, lavender, pink	Grows best in cool, moist conditions, not well suited to Nebraska's climate
Sweet Potato Vine	<i>Ipomoea batatas</i>	Sun, part shade	Vine	Lavender flowers, green, purple foliage	Heart-shaped leaves on a trailing plant, foliage green to burgundy or variegated, rarely flowers

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to thank Susan Schoneweis for her work on an earlier version of this publication.

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Issued October 2007

Extension is a Division of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln cooperating with the Counties and the United States Department of Agriculture.

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