

## Annuals that perennially reappear in your garden

Annuals are those plants that complete their life cycle—from germination, flower production to senescence or death, in one growing season. Unlike perennials, they must be replanted as new seedlings every growing season. But since all flowers in our gardens start their lives as seeds, those annuals that are free with their seed dispersal will often germinate the following season when conditions are once again suitable for their growth.

So, even though the parent plant has died, its offspring in the form of seeds will germinate wherever the parent flourished. Not all annuals will do this, as the seed may not be able to survive the period from dispersal until conditions improve for germination.

But some lovely annuals do, indeed, become “perennial” in your garden, if you know not to disturb their seeds when they germinate the next season. Among those that can be counted on to shed seeds that will germinate are cleome, love-in-a-mist, verbena, and both forms of cosmos. It is important for the gardener to recognize the seed leaves and the mature leaves of the plant in order to distinguish from the many weeds that will also germinate come spring. So, look at your flowering plants now when they are at their peak and learn to recognize them. Or, do not disturb the soil where you have left the flower seeds to fall. Most germination next season is random and often unexpected, since the seedlings may not be exactly where the mature plant once was. This is why leaf recognition is important. Or, you can collect the dried flowerheads and save the seeds to disburse in the early spring. This can give you more control over where the seedlings will grow. But, if you, like me, collect and fail to label the seeds, thinking you will most definitely recognize them next spring, this method will often give you a delightful surprise.

I have had cleomes (*Cleome hassleriana*) or spider flower, in my garden for years. Sometimes I save the seeds; other times I simply sprinkle the seeds contained in the pods along the stems right where I want them. Unfailingly, next year I have my cleomes where I want them, (and also in the cracks of the sidewalk and in the street border.) Once they sprout and before they are too large, I carefully transplant them elsewhere in my garden.

*Verbena bonariensis*, the tall, lacy, purple flower self-seeds in my garden without my intervention, as I do not even know when the seeds are ready or even what they look like. I suspect they are quite small and are easily dispersed without my help.

As for cosmos, the seeds of both species *bipinnatus* (the pink, purple and white flowered variety) and *sulfureus* (the orange and yellow variety) will dry on the flowerhead, making them easy to harvest and scatter in fall.

Borage (*Borago officinalis*) is an herb with a very pretty purple-blue flower. It readily self-seeds. The flowers are borne on tall stalks in branched pendulous cymes.

Lastly, the lacy blue and white flower globes of Love-in-a-Mist (*Nigella damascena*) are delightful as fresh or dried flowerheads. The seeds from my *Nigella* originally came from some flowerheads I was using in a dried hydrangea wreath. As I swept out the tiny black seeds from

the garage floor, they landed alongside the driveway and in the neighboring flower beds, only to germinate that same year and winter over and thrive the next spring, being taller and sturdier than I suspect they would have been if I had carefully planted the seeds in the spring. Of course, they landed where they chose, and I usually have to replant a few and remove some from my lawn, but I have learned to love them where they rebloom every year.

So, the serendipity of finding a beloved annual again in our garden without having planted it is really a gift of nature and is one of the many delights of gardening.