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THE FRAGRANT GARDEN

TEXT BY THOMAS CHRISTOPHER

When it comes to selecting
annuals to plant in beds,
borders, and containers, just
follow your nose.

Gardeners tend to focus more on a flower's color, form, and texture than on its scent. That's understandable, given that sight and touch (together with hearing) are our sharpest senses. But our sense of smell is thought to be the oldest and most evocative. When you consider fragrance, you can create a garden that engages and delights on another level.

Evolutionary biologists believe that smell was the first sense animals developed, and this ancient faculty—though relatively crude in humans as compared with some other mammals—retains a special place in our consciousness. Olfactory sensors connect directly to the brain's most primitive area, which also governs emotions and emotional memory. That's why a recollected smell, such as the aroma of cookies baking, can make us feel warm and secure: It transports the mind back to the kitchen of our youth. And it's the reason that the perfume of an old-fashioned flower can fill us with the childlike joy we felt when we first smelled it in Grandmother's garden.

In fact, fragrances of flowers and foliage are a type of scent to which the human nose is particularly sensitive. No doubt that's left over from when distinguishing between the nutritious plant and the poisonous one was a daily, and crucial, decision. Today, though, the ability to appreciate the way plants smell means we can give the garden a rare richness. We can surround ourselves with subconscious stimuli that recombine and change with every breeze.

Annuals are the ideal plants for this purpose. Quick-growing and adapted to container cultivation, they have a prolonged season of bloom and provide consistent fragrance throughout it. Annuals also allow for flexibility. By changing the mix every year or even every season, you also transform how you experience the garden.

There are many ways to take advantage of fragrant annuals. Plant aromatic-foliaged herbs next to paths so you can brush against them and release their scents in passing. Interplant annuals to enhance a border of shrubbery. Also think about a plant's distinctive characteristics. Nicotianas, the recently popular *Zaluzianskya capensis*, and certain

petunias release their floral perfumes at night. Plant them around a patio for summertime moon-viewing or underneath a bedroom window for a sweet sleep. Used in arrangements of cut flowers and foliage, fragrant annuals will also add bouquet to your bouquets—and fill the house with pleasant memories, too.



Step back in time with the sweet perfume of stock, *Matthiola incana*, an old-time favorite whose stems are wrapped here in leaves of peppermint geranium, *Pelargonium tomentosum*. Although technically a biennial, stock is commonly grown as a cool-weather annual. **OPPOSITE:** Sweet peas, *Lathyrus odoratus*, combine a graceful climbing habit with butterfly-like blossoms; the best cultivars are superbly fragrant.



MOONFLOWER



'CUPANI'S ORIGINAL' SWEET PEA



HELIOTROPE
DUSTY MILLER
SANTOLINA
THYME

ABOVE: A window box can bring the outdoors in. Hints of vanilla from these sprightly heliotrope blossoms will waft into the house on a gentle breeze. Pink and purple petunias add color; their trailing habit makes them excellent in containers. Dusty miller (the silvery plant at left), santolina (with feathery leaves, in back), and thyme (in front) are planted in the bed below, so their woody scents will be released as one tends to the window box. TOP LEFT: Moonflower, a fast-growing annual vine, opens lemon-scented flowers after sunset to attract pollinating moths. ABOVE LEFT: Bicolored blossoms and outstanding heat tolerance make 'Cupani's Original' one of the finest fragrant sweet peas.



'PRISCILLA' AND 'ROYAL VELVET' PETUNIAS
'LEMON LICORICE' HELICHRYSUM



'CHARLES GRIMALDI' ANGEL'S TRUMPET



'FRAGRANT CLOUD' NICOTIANA
PURPLE PERILLA

ABOVE: This basket hangs like a chandelier over an alfresco dining table, with colorful blossoms rather than crystals. Its sweet-scented 'Priscilla' and 'Royal Velvet' petunias, intertwined with *Helichrysum petiolare* 'Lemon Licorice,' bloom from late spring to frost, delighting butterflies and hummingbirds as well as diners. TOP RIGHT: The foot-long, golden trumpets of *Brugmansia* 'Charles Grimaldi' exhale their potent perfume at dusk. This fast-growing tropical shrub may reach a height of eight feet in a single summer's growth. ABOVE RIGHT: Pale *Nicotiana* 'Fragrant Cloud' blossoms seem to glow against purple-leaved perilla, an herb also known as shiso, brightening a shady spot.



ABOVE LEFT: Unlike the more common zonal geraniums, scented geraniums offer as their principal attraction not colorful blossoms but an endless array of fragrances in their vastly varied foliage. Included here are 'Attar of Roses,' 'Dr. Livingstone,' and 'Old Fashioned Rose' (all rose scented), as well as 'Nutmeg' and 'Rober's Lemon Rose.' ABOVE RIGHT: This window box delights the nose with *Dianthus* 'Rosie Cheeks' and 'Ruby's Tuesday'; trailing *Ipomoea tricolor* gives the display drama and texture as well.

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LEARN ABOUT OTHER FRAGRANT PLANTS AT marthastewart.com/fragrant-annuals

10 favorites

Like a perfumer mixing different notes to create a trademark scent, gardeners can choose and combine annuals for the way they smell.

1. **ZALUZIANSKYA CAPENSIS** Flowers redolent of freshly baked cake or cookies.
2. **AGASTACHE 'HEATHER QUEEN'** Foliage has a mintlike aroma, with hints of licorice and citrus.
3. **LOBULARIA MARITIMA** Blooms perfumed like honey.
4. **PETUNIA X HYBRIDA** Blossoms are rich in various floral notes, particularly at night.
5. **DIANTHUS** Flowers have spicy, clove fragrances.
6. **IMPATIENS BALSAMINA** Powdery, aromatic blooms.
7. **ANGELONIA ALATA** Grape-scented flowers.
8. **NICOTIANA ALATA** Night-fragrant flowers with musk perfume.
9. **PELARGONIUM 'ATTAR OF ROSES'** Aromatic foliage with a powerful rose scent.
10. **HELIOTROPIMUM ARBORESCENS** Flowers with vanilla perfume.

