

District-maintained areas change out annual plantings every three months

They say April showers bring May flowers, but I believe that usually refers to areas that are left to grow naturally, such as roadsides or meadows.

Here in The Villages most of our areas are regularly mowed or otherwise maintained, so it is more likely to be a large truck with lots of racks that brings the flowers. Since we get calls and emails from residents inquiring how this process works, let me explain.

The annuals are changed out every three months at all District-maintained areas. People tend to ask questions such as, "Why did they pull them out when they still looked good?" or "Couldn't they have gotten a couple more weeks out of them and saved money?"

Although it is a great idea, there are reasons why we replace them on a certain schedule.

In the District-maintained areas alone, our contractors change out more than 300,000 annuals roughly every three months. That is more than 1.2 million 4-inch to 4 1/2-inch potted annuals per year.

Understandably, they can't just go down to the nearest garden center and get even a fraction of what they would need. So how do the contractors get 300,000 quality annuals for each rotation?

Often they purchase them from specialty growers that cultivate all their annuals up to a year in advance. Our contractor must take them at the time the grower contracted to have them ready, or they might be too tall or root-bound.

Most of the time, the annual mix consists of three to eight or even up to 10 different colors or varieties of annuals. This is for



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what I call the "wow" factor.

One solid color usually means one variety of plant. If something goes wrong with that particular type of plant either due to culture, fungus or insects, the whole area can suffer.

Some varieties do well in more moist conditions, which works well if we have a rainy summer. Others can take the heat or drought better. If one variety does not thrive due to a particular seasonal condition, the other varieties usually will fill in any voids that might show up.

Keep in mind these plants usually are contract-grown many months in advance. If one type of plant got wiped out in a particular bed due to an accident in a roundabout, a mainline irrigation break that washes out an area or emergency work on utilities, a particular color or type of annual might not be available to match the existing, surrounding beds.

When repairing such damage, a mix of matching annuals is more likely to be available to a maintenance contractor.

Several of our maintenance contractors also may utilize grower services to plant the annuals for them. Our contractors usually pull the old annuals out and dispose of them. Then, they prep the beds by tilling them and adding a special soil mix if it is needed. This is done right before the trucks show up with the racks of annuals from the grower.

Since the grower focuses

specifically on annuals, they usually have crews that are experienced in planting them and can accomplish the task in a timely and consistent manner from area to area. This is a benefit to the District, because it does not take away from the contractors performing their regular tasks throughout the community such as mowing, trimming shrubs and weeding.

When workers are replacing annuals, traffic usually is re-directed for safety and access reasons. Please use caution when any of our maintenance contractors are working out in the community.

After the color beds are changed, the maintenance contractor goes back in to check for good irrigation coverage, makes adjustments as needed and waters the new plants put in.

At this time, they add the proper time-release fertilizer and possibly apply a product to prevent weed seeds from sprouting and competing with the plants in the newly planted color bed.

In closing, the last thing I want to mention associated with the color bed change-outs is to please avoid stopping to ask if a contractor will give you some of the annuals they are disposing of. This disrupts the removal process and can cause safety concerns if a vehicle stops in the roadway to talk to the workers. It can put both the worker and the person slowing down or stopping at risk if someone else is not paying attention when driving.

That's all for me this time, but I look forward to meeting you again next time, here at Our Place.

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