

## 10 goofproof plants

If tending to your flora is leaving *you* feeling wilted, take heart: These plants are **almost impossible to kill**.

IT'S NO FUN TO COME HOME after a long day at work to find your American Beauties looking (pathetically, prematurely!) past their peak. So *Real Simple* tracked down pretty, colorful plants of a less finicky temperament—ones that can hold their own against Mother Nature's whims and your occasional neglect. To get started on the path of least maintenance, pick from the following plants, which can live in pots or in the ground and virtually never say die.

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN GRUEN

“Do you like daisies? I plant them, but they always die. Everything I put in the ground withers and dies.”

Juliet Landau as Drusilla  
on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*




**a few gardening terms**

■ **Deadheading:** Snipping dead or faded flowers to encourage more blooms.

■ **Pinching back:** Removing stems with your fingertips (or a pruner) to shape a plant and stimulate new growth.

■ **Self-cleaning:** This refers to plants that shed old blooms naturally.


**PLANT-CARE KEY**


 **Full sun:** Six or more hours of sun between 10 A.M. and 6 P.M.

 **Partial sun:** Four to six hours of sun.

 **Partial shade:** Two to four hours of sun.

 **Full shade:** Two hours or less of sun.

 **Heat-tolerant:** Thrives at temperatures over 86 degrees Fahrenheit for long periods.


 **Drought-tolerant:** Once established (after two or three weeks), can go a week or two with little water.

 **Dry out:** Let the soil dry out between waterings.

 **Keep moist:** Make sure the soil stays damp.

**1. Verbena** 

This new flowering hybrid resists fungus (which can weaken the plant and cause the leaves to shrivel). And, happily, it's self-cleaning (see A Few Gardening Terms, right). Shown: Superbena 'Pink Shades.'

**2. New Guinea impatiens** 

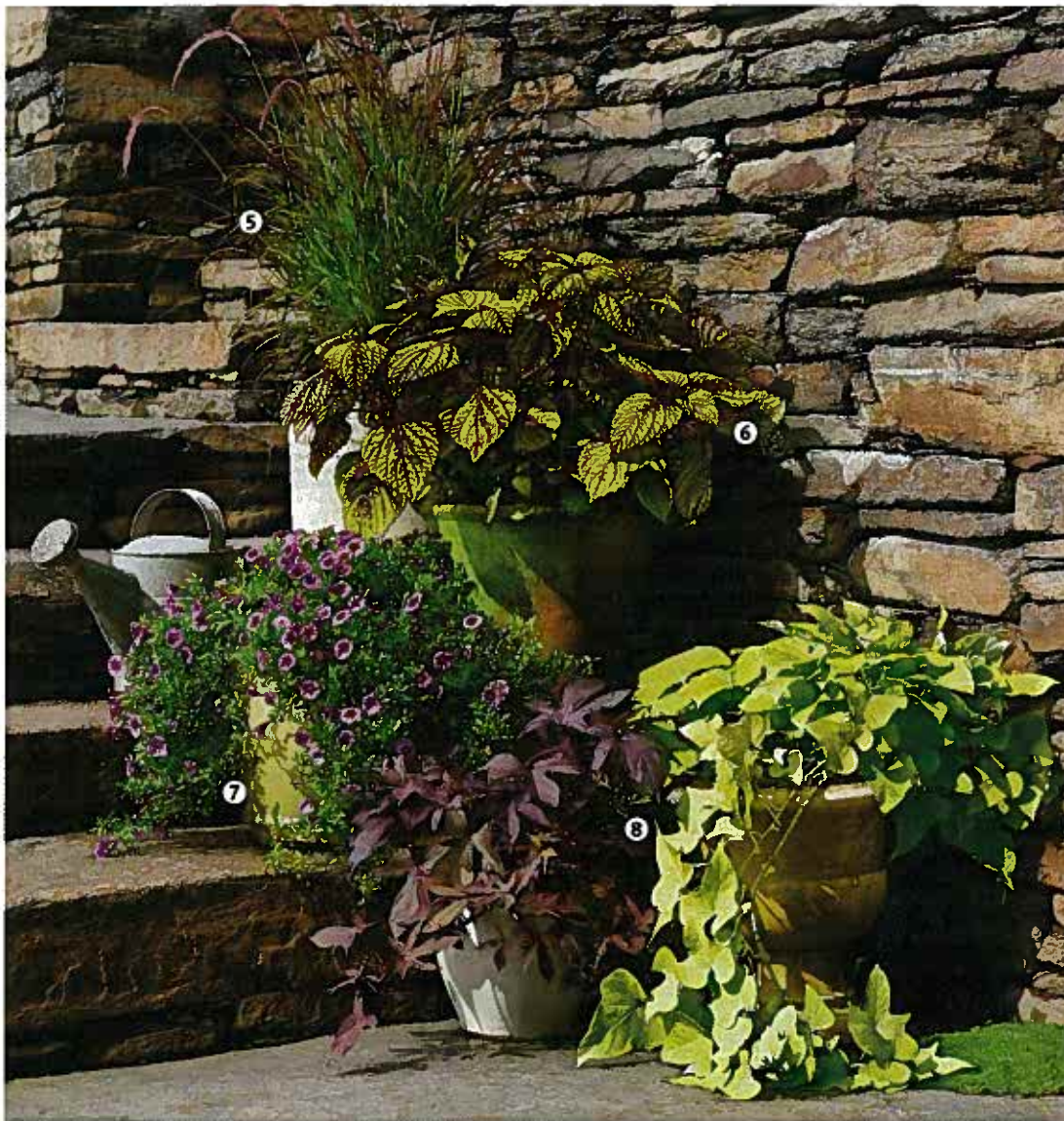
This variety of impatiens, with its showy flowers, is uniquely versatile. It can handle some sun, unlike the more commonly found species, which like only shade. Also self-cleaning. Shown: 'Infinity White.'

**3. Geranium** 

It's a mainstay of window boxes everywhere, and here's why: This flower comes in dozens of colors and flourishes in many climates. *Pelargonium zonale* is particularly vigorous. To care for it, simply deadhead and pinch back as needed. Shown: 'Daredevil Snow.'

**4. Euphorbia** 

With masses of tiny flowers, *Euphorbia hypericifolia* is pretty and self-cleaning. And deer will steer clear of it (they don't like the taste). Shown: 'Diamond Frost.'



### soil and food pointers

The 10 plants here are easy to begin with and will be easier still if you follow these guidelines.

■ **Soil:** Buy a light-weight potting mix from a garden center, preferably a sterile, loose mixture. Look for these ingredients on the label: peat moss, vermiculite, and decomposed organic matter.

■ **Food:** When planting, mix a time-release fertilizer, such as Dynamite or Osmocote, into the soil. Follow the directions on the package. Once a week, during regular watering, use a water-soluble fertilizer, such as Miracle-Gro or an organic fish emulsion.

#### 5. Purple fountain grass 🌿🌿🌿💧

A gracefully arching ornamental grass with fuzzy, rose-colored seed heads, 'Rebrum' can withstand just about anything, including high humidity and wind. It's pest- and disease-free, too. Shown: *Pennisetum setaceum*.

#### 6. Coleus 🌿🌿🌿💧

Prized for its bold, variegated foliage, this two-tone stunner is easy to grow and thrives in summer. It comes in a slew of gorgeous colors. To care for it, deadhead and pinch back as needed. Shown: 'Fishnet Stockings.'

#### 7. Calibrachoa 🌸💧

This cascading beauty, covered in small flowers, makes a great hanging plant. It's self-cleaning and resistant to disease. Shown: Superbells 'Tickled Pink.'

#### 8. Sweet-potato vine 🌿🌿🌿💧

This ornamental plant grows extremely quickly. It won't climb walls or trellises, but it will trail beautifully over pots. Lush, dramatic colors include deep purple, bronze, and lime green. Shown: 'Blackie' (left) and 'Margarita' (right).

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9. Begonia

Unlike other begonias, which need to be in the shade, *Begonia boliviensis* fares well in full sun or partial shade. And it rewards you with a profuse shower of tubular, orange red flowers. It benefits from an occasional pinching back. Shown: 'Bonfire.'

10. Lantana

This self-cleaning plant has flower petals with multiple colors (like confetti). The strong fragrance of the leaves deters deer, and hot days stimulate it to produce more blossoms, which attract butterflies and hummingbirds. Shown: Luscious 'Citrus Blend.'

how to read  
a garden tag

Besides explaining the plant's water and sunlight requirements, tags will list these terms.

- **Blooms:** The season or specific months you can expect to see flowers.
- **Habit:** A plant's growth pattern, such as mounded (a big, bushy heap) or trailing (vinelike).
- **Size:** The maximum height and diameter the plant will reach at maturity.
- **Zone:** Lists the plant's hardiness in respect to where you live. (There are 11 zones in the United States; go to [usna.usda.gov](http://usna.usda.gov) to find yours.)

What should you use to water your plants? Check out the Road Test of spray nozzles on page 115.