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Easy to grow flowers for remembrance and new gardens

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The famous plant breeder, scientist, botanist, and horticulturalist, Luther Burbank wrote, "Flowers always make people better, happier, and more helpful; they are sunshine, food and medicine for the soul."

Flowers are symbols for many causes, occasions, and places. Wearing a red poppy honors America's war dead on Memorial Day, daffodils are the symbol for the American Cancer Association, and Easter Lilies for Easter Seals. The gardenia means love; the geranium symbolizes gentility and determination; the gladiolus strength of character and conviction; and gorse, an unappealing "weedy" bush is a symbol for love in all seasons! Nations are represented by flowers. Laos has the plumeria, Jordan is represented by a black iris, Israel the poppy anemone, and North Korea the magnolia!

Flowers have become iconic to honor those who have died; i.e. flowers on graves, a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, or thrown onto the water for ships and people lost at sea. Memorial Day is coming soon, a holiday that has evolved into a national commemoration for all who have died. Originally, we placed flags and flowers only on graves of men and women who served in our Armed Forces. It has now become a time of remembrance for all who have passed, including our loved ones.

People who place memorial containers on loved ones graves cannot always care for the flowers because of distance or time. Therefore, carefree, but colorful flowers are preferred over high maintenance flowers that quickly become unsightly. Additionally, many inexperienced gardeners placing flowers on graves experience an epiphany that colorful, low maintenance flowers could also grace their residence.

Containers with beautiful pre-planted flowers can be purchased at Bloomers. Many of these planters have geraniums growing in the center and vinca vine or alyssum trailing the outer edges. Geraniums are ideal for memorial containers as they withstand hot sun, dry conditions and overwatering. They don't suffer greatly if they are not frequently dead-headed as the pedicel bearing the flower may die and fall off on it's own. If dead heading is done, use your finger nails to "nip" the pedicel off where it attaches to the main stem. Additionally, the bright red of many geranium cultivars is a strong statement that a loved one lies here.

If the resting spot is shaded, begonias are a good container choice. Most varieties have waxy, bright green leaves and red or pink flowers. The need

for dead heading is minimal and plants tolerate many conditions from hot and humid, cool and moist, to hot and dry.

Following are a few other plant suggestions for the memorial container or the new gardener wanting easy-to-grow and carefree plants for a garden. This is not a conclusive list and with a little on-line research or perusal of Bloomers' website a new gardener may discover other plants more to their liking.

Dusty Miller leaves are silvery and furry, an attractive companion for many other plants in a container. In the garden, the yellow blooms are inconspicuous; however the beautiful foliage is long lasting, drought resistant, and tolerates frost.

Marigolds bloom in bright gold, copper, and brass colors all summer long. They withstand dry conditions very well but, if in the container or garden, the soil should be dry between waterings and plants watered only at their base. Do not fertilize as this will encourage lush foliage but discourage blooming. Strangely, marigolds bloom better growing in "poor" soil.

Million bells or calibrachoa blooms nonstop without the need for deadheading. If planted in a container or hanging basket, it will spill gracefully over the sides. If planted in a garden setting it is more suitable for a rock garden. It can tolerate light frost and thrive in sun or semi-shade. Plant in a well drained soil and water only when the soil is almost dry. Plants attract butterflies and hummingbirds.

Euphorbia is a varied genus with many forms. Most like heat and humidity but need a well drained soil. They produce an abundance of blooms and are deer and rabbit resistant.

Lantana, a butterfly magnet, has small balls of many colored flowers that change hues as they fade. Plants tolerate full sun, heat, humidity and drought.

Zinnias like full sun and also tolerate heat, humidity and drought. They come in several colors and, depending on the variety, grow to different heights from a foot to about knee high.

Nasturtiums are very easy plants to grow but wait until after the last frost to sow seeds into moist, well-drained soil. Plants prefer full sun and will not bloom as well in partial shade. No need to fertilize as plants growing in fertile soil produce fewer blooms. These are easy plants for children to grow and the flowers are edible with a slight "peppery" taste.

Impatiens are undemanding but plant after the last frost. They grow best in a shady spot but have to be regularly watered. The disease downy mildew is a problem but the "Bounce" series is disease resistant.

Some other plants to consider for the beginning gardener would be moss roses, sunflowers, cleomes or spider flowers, cranesbills, daylillies, sage, snapdragon, pansies, daffodils, and gillardias to name a few.

To encourage a beginning gardener, French artist Claude Monet said, "Garden as though you will live forever."