

# Buying bedding plants

HAVE YOU BOUGHT YOUR BEDDING PLANTS YET? If you haven't it's not too late, but there are several things to consider before you plunk down your hard-earned cash at the most convenient retailer. The fact is that not all bedding plant outlets are created equal. While it's true that many local retailers buy from the same wholesalers, the difference is in how the plants are treated once they arrive at the retailer.

Here are 10 tips that will help ensure that you will go home with both good plants and good value:

1. Always count the plants in the pack. A plant should be growing in each cell, but that is not always the case.
2. Plants can't grow strong root systems in packs with very small cell volume. Four-packs allow more room for root growth than do six-packs. However, if you purchase small plants and transplant them immediately, six-packs can be a good value.
3. Look for plants that are stocky, dark green and uniform in size. Once transplanted, their growth will soon pass tall and spindly ones.
4. Buy "green plants"—ones that are not yet in flower. Plants that are not blooming will be more vigorous and will not suffer as much transplant shock, as do blooming plants that are putting most of their energy into flowering.
5. Plants in four-inch pots will cost considerably more per plant than those in packs, but they will have a better-developed root system, and may be well worth the extra cost.
6. Packs with root-bound plants often are very light, even after watering, because they cannot absorb and hold water—don't buy them, they are stressed.
7. Inquire about a discount when you buy several flats of bedding plants. Some retailers will give discounts even though they do not advertise the fact.
8. Most outlets receive new plant shipments every week or two during the bedding plant season. Ask when new shipments are expected. Even at seasonal outlets newly arrived bedding plants will be fresh and in their best condition.
9. Customers sometimes inadvertently mix the plastic plant labels after plants have been on display for a while. This is an additional incentive for shopping soon after a shipment arrives.
10. Drastically reduced bedding plant prices are often not a bargain. They are likely to be past their prime.

Taking time to discover the best place to shop for your bedding plants will be well worth your effort. You will get healthier plants and will most often receive helpful information from the sales staff. And your flowerbeds will be a delight rather than a despair this summer