

**Flower Fever**  
**By: Amy Bledsoe**

It happens every spring. The feeling to connect with nature and plant something new in our yards hits us. People will flock to the local garden center with their eyes glazed over with enthusiasm. The long, dreary winter has left them starved for color. Anxious to appease this need for color, they gleefully place blooming plants into their shopping carts to take home to their yards. Visions of a glorious, colorful garden spot fill their heads as they drive home with their treasures. All too often shoppers have already made their first mistake. Do you know how to properly shop for plants?

Garden centers have done their homework. They know that people love to see plants in bloom and will fill their carts with them. Colorful displays of plant material entice us to buy these beauties. The trouble is this isn't what should be placed in the cart. It is far better to leave the blooming plants on the display table, and pick up the plants that haven't set blooms. If you insist on buying blooming plants, be prepared to remove the blooms when you get them home. Plants spend a lot of their energy on flowers. Removing the blooms will redirect the plant to make roots. A strong root system will be better able to support many blooms only a short time later. Don't be afraid to pop a plant out of a cell pack to have a look at the root system. You want a strong, healthy root system with plenty of white roots that are not encircling the pot. If the plants' roots are a shriveled up brown color, leave them on the table. Look closely for signs of insects. Look on the bottom side of the leaf and at the stems. Once the plants have passed inspection, you are half way to your goal. Stop. Think. Where exactly are you going to plant these flowers? Is it sunny? All day? Part of the day? Is it morning or afternoon sun that spot gets? The answer will make all the difference in the world to your plant. If you're not sure whether the plant will work in the site you have in mind, ask your garden center worker. Don't believe the tag. Often they are tags made for the entire nation, not our local area. A knowledgeable horticulturist at the garden center is a valuable tool in your quest for an awesome garden. Do you have enough plants to make the visual impact you desire? If grouping plants together, use complimentary colors and textures of companion plants that like the same growing conditions.

OK. You have your cart full of plants and you're headed toward the checkout. Wait a minute. Do you have a slow release fertilizer? What about some compost? Do you have a good pair of gardening gloves and a trowel or shovel? Don't forget about mulch to place around your plants. How do you plan to water your plant babies? Maybe you'd better go get a soaker hose and some sod staples to hold the hose in place. Now you're set! Happy gardening!