



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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Connecticut's Bedding Plants Burst into Bloom in May

Hartford, CT – As the month of April yields to May, Connecticut seems to burst into color. Spring bulbs emerge, trees and shrubs begin to unfold their buds, and the state's bedding plants explode into bloom.

What, exactly, is a 'bedding plant?' The website Answers.com defines it as "a plant that has already been grown to blooming or near-blooming size before being planted out in a usually formal area for seasonal display of colorful flowers or foliage."

Connecticut experts recommend waiting to put these plants in the home garden until mid-May, when a late frost is unlikely to impact most areas of the state. Gardeners hoping to get a jump on the season often take a gamble, however, and plant as early as the first of May; they then watch weather forecasts carefully, and cover plants with a sheet or special "row cover" material if temperatures are expected to dip near the freezing mark.

Another description of bedding plants is

...annual plants that complete their life cycles in a single growing season. Others are actually tender perennials that we treat as annuals in temperate regions of the country. Still others are bulbs, herbs, ground covers, vegetables, small fruits, or woody plants.

Clearly, the term bedding plant is not a botanical classification but a term that describes plants that share a common method of production and marketing.

Bedding plants are produced in greenhouses, grown and sold in market flats, and marketed in retail stores, such as mass-market outlets or garden centers. (Source: [Alabama Cooperative Extension website](#).)

In Connecticut, these plants are grown in the state's estimated 300 commercial greenhouse businesses. Their combined production space is approximately 9,000,000 SF, with wholesale sales near \$200 million annually, according to Robert Heffernan, Executive Director of the [Connecticut Green Industries](#).

These growers produce millions of bedding plants each year; this year's projections include 125,000 begonia plants, over 1 million geraniums, 600,000 impatiens plants, 250,000 pansies, and a combined total of 2 million other bedding plants. Because Cheshire contains such a large concentration of greenhouse growers, it commonly is called "The Bedding Plant Capital of Connecticut."

As many as 50 percent of the bedding plants produced in the state are exported outside of Connecticut, bringing in millions of dollars from other areas.

Bedding plants are a significant part of Connecticut's environmental horticulture industry, which includes more than 3,350 firms statewide. These companies are involved in production (nurseries, greenhouses, herbs, cut flowers, turfgrass), retail (garden centers, florists), and landscape services (landscape design, installation, maintenance, lawn care, tree care).

"The environmental horticulture industry is not only a large sector of the state's agriculture, it is a significant contributor to Connecticut's economy," said Mr. Heffernan. "Research shows that environmental horticulture produced an estimated \$1.022 billion in gross income in 2007" (the latest year for which figures are available).

"The industry is a good source of jobs, too," Mr. Heffernan continued. "At least 48,000 people are employed in this industry, half of those full-time. Another 5,800 workers are needed, including 3,300 full-time positions. This industry paid an estimated \$490 million to employees

in 2007, including benefits, with an average increase in cost of labor per firm of 15 percent from 2004 to 2007. Those figures are quite significant in today's economy.”

All this is good news for the state's consumers, because it means they can find the very freshest, healthiest, highest-quality plants at Connecticut's garden centers, mass retailers, and farmers' markets, usually within a few dozen miles from where they have been grown. These CT Grown plants have not been shipped long distances on enclosed trucks, and, as a result, have not been subjected to cultural stresses that can result in less-than-desirable results when transplanted into the garden.

To find a retailer of CT Grown bedding plants, consumers can go to the brand new CT Garden and Landscape Trail at www.ctgardentrail.com. This informative guide features over 60 facilities of Connecticut's Green Industry, including nurseries, garden centers, greenhouses, and landscapers. It also provides abbreviated listings for another 86 similar businesses, along with more than three dozen beautiful public garden sites.

Thousands of customers seeking CT Grown bedding plants and shrubs turn out each spring at the popular early morning farmers' market held daily on the grounds of the [Hartford Regional Market](#). Market officials recommend shoppers bring a flashlight and arrive early for best selection (gates open at 5:00 AM).

For those who prefer to sleep in until the rooster crows, a list of farmers' markets throughout the state, nearly 30 of which open for the season in May, is available on the [Publications](#) page of the [CT Department of Agriculture](#)'s website.

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