A plant's growth from seed to fully grown plant that reproduces is called its life cycle. Some plants have a life cycle which is over in a few weeks while others may live for hundreds of years.

A SHORT LIFE CYCLE
Some plants have a life cycle that is only a few weeks. These plants are called ephemerals. The seeds of ephemerals germinate soon after they are dispersed so that the life cycle of one plant can follow another through the spring to the autumn.

The Shepherd's Purse, above, is an ephemeral plant.

ONE YEAR LIFE CYCLE
Many plants complete their life cycle in one year. They are called annual plants. Their seeds are usually formed and dispersed in the autumn by the parent plants. During the winter the seeds survive in the soil and in the following spring they germinate. The seedlings grow up during the spring and the plants become full grown by the summer and produce flowers. Fruits are formed in the late summer which contain seeds for the following year. When the seeds are dispersed the plants die.

The marigolds and petunias in this flower bed are annuals.

TWO YEAR LIFE CYCLE
Plants which have a two year life cycle are called biennials. The carrot is a biennial and at the end of its first year it stores food in its root so it can use it in the following to help it grow flowers and produce seeds.

LONG-LIVED PLANTS
Plants which live for many years are called perennials. Parts of the shoot of perennial plants may die away at the end of the growing season while other parts of the shoot and the roots live on underground.

Woody flowering plants such as trees and bushes are perennials but their shoots do not die back. Their leaves fall off and the shoot is protected from the winter weather by the bark.

These carrots are being dug up to provide food for people instead of letting them grow shoots again next year.

The iris is a perennial. After its leaves die away its underground shoot and roots live in the soil through the winter.

The bark insulates these tree trunks from the cold weather.