

Pansies brighten fall and winter landscape

*By Daniel E. Mullins
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Flashes of color in the landscape help to lift our spirits and chase away the doldrums during the short days of winter. Though there are several kinds of flowers that can provide cool-season color, pansies are one of the best.

Garden centers and retail nurseries have a good supply of pansies, generally sold as started plants in cell packs ready for transplanting to prepared beds.

Pansies are truly cool-season flowers; so the sooner that they are planted, the longer they can be enjoyed. Hot weather, which usually begins in May, causes pansies to decline rapidly.

The growth habit of pansies make them ideal for small or mass plantings. Space them about one foot apart so that many colorful blossoms create the most accents.

A wide range of color choices is available, including yellow, white, blue, pink, red, mahogany and even multicolored. Choose colors carefully.

Mixed colors might work well if an informal look is your goal. A solid color that contrasts with the surrounding landscape also is very effective. And a bed of only two colors, either complementary or contrasting colors, can be spectacular.

Prepare the planting bed by thoroughly tilling or spading to a depth of 6 to 8 inches. Incorporate an organic soil amendment such as peat, compost or manure through the entire bed.

A fertilizer such as 15-0-15 can be incorporated into the soil. Use three-quarters of a pound per hundred square feet of area. A slow-release fertilizer is best.

Many of our soils have adequate phosphorous. But, if a soil test reveals that phosphorous is needed, a 10-10-10 fertilizer can be used. However, be aware that phosphorous is the major pollutant of our lake waters, so use it only if a soil test indicates the need.

Space plants 10 to 14 inches apart, and plant just deep enough that the top of the root ball is even with the soil surface.

Mulch the entire bed to a depth of 2 to 3 inches, using a coarse material such as pine needles or bark. Pull mulch a couple of inches away from the crowns of the plants.

Water slowly and thoroughly to settle the soil and drive out any air pockets. Regular watering will be required, especially during the first few weeks after planting. Irrigate during the early morning hours in order to reduce the potential for leaf spotting and crown rot.

Remove old flowers as soon as they begin to decline. This practice discourages seed production and keeps the flowering cycle going.

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