

## Brighten the Winter Landscape with Pansies

Daniel E. Mullins\*

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The pansy is one of our best winter annual flowers. It is extremely cold tolerant, able to withstand hard freezes and recover completely. A well established and maintained pansy bed provides color throughout the winter and into late spring.



There are now many pansy colors from which to choose including white, red, purple and orange. Both solid colors, often called "clear faced" pansies, and those with blotches, known as "faced" pansies, are available. There are also two-tones and pastels, as well as those cultivars having flowers with crinkled or ruffled edges. Pansy Growing at a Glance

Prepare beds, purchase and establish plants in a bright, sunny location by mid-November for best results.

Pansy plants are available in a wide range of container sizes from small cell packs to 3 and 4 inch pots. Those in larger pots usually have better developed root systems and provide more immediate effect than smaller plants.

Bed preparation includes the addition and incorporation of organic materials such as peat, compost or manures. Make certain that the amendment has been fully decomposed prior to using it.

Obtain the best effect from pansies by planting for mass effect. Though they can be spaced from 6 to 12 inches apart, 8 to 10 inches apart is most often recommended. Extremely close spacing can bring on pest problems, while extra wide spacings reduce the mass effect.

Set plants so that the top of the root ball is even with the top of the surrounding soil. Avoid excessively deep planting as this can result in root and stem rot problems.

Mulch the soil surface with pine bark, pine needles or similar material as soon as planting is completed. Apply the mulch carefully in order to prevent covering of the foliage.

Water thoroughly, settling the soil around the root system of the new plants. Watering will be required throughout the season, but space irrigation applications to avoid boggy or constantly wet conditions.

Supplemental fertilization will be required, but avoid the use of fertilizers with high rates of ammoniacal nitrogen. This form of nitrogen is slow to be taken up when the soil is cold. Instead,

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a soluble fertilizer such as 20-10-20 containing [nitrate nitrogen](#) can be used at transplanting and periodically throughout the winter. As the soil warms up next spring, use a slow release fertilizer or reduce the amount of nitrogen being applied in order to prevent excessive growth.

Remove old, spent blossoms and dead leaves on a regular basis. This practice encourages continuous growth and flowering, while reducing the incidence of disease.

Question of the Week: I have heard that leaves and pine needles are acidic. If so, will they cause plant problems if used as mulch.

Answer: Leaves and pine needles make good mulch. It's true that as they decompose the reaction is slightly acidic, but this fact should not discourage their use.

*\*Daniel E. Mullins is Extension Horticulture Agent, University of Florida IFAS Extension in Santa Rosa County*

*Photo courtesy of Horticulture and Crop Science Ohio State University*

*Photo by Ed Schroeder, Leon County Master Gardener.*

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