

## Plant a Spring Cottage Garden Now in Fall



*Photos: Hollyhocks (by Michal Misiurewicz) and snapdragons (by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension) can provide much color in a spring cottage garden. But here in the Tallahassee area, they need to be planted now in the fall. Don't wait until spring.*

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An English cottage garden is a garden of planned chaos, a small plot or border containing many different textures, colors, and plant heights in a seemingly random mix. Tall spiky flowering plants are most dramatic and spring brings many of these. The main players in a spring cottage garden are delphiniums, larkspur, hollyhocks, poppies, snapdragons, and foxglove. All of these benefit from being planted early. Their root systems grow during the winter months, providing good support for the long stems in spring. A little patience and understanding is required because the tops of the plants just sit there all winter and sometimes can actually look downright pitiful after they are planted. Keep in mind the little crown at the soil level and the roots are the important part.

Hollyhocks are the tallest of the group and are best planted at the back of the bed with a few haphazardly placed near the front for extra drama. The flower stalks can reach over six feet with brightly colored tissue paper-like flowers all up and down the stem.

Delphiniums are most effective in a mass or in small groups in the bed. They are available in several sizes. Pacific Giants are the tallest type reaching 4-6 feet. Magic Fountains only get 2-3 feet. Colors range from pink and white to lavender and purple. The most striking is the electric true "Delphinium Blue". A mixture of colors and heights will compliment the planned chaos of the garden.

Larkspur is like a short version of Delphiniums and come in a similar color range. They can be set out by seedlings but they are very easy to grow from seed just by scattering.

Knee High and Rocket snapdragons provide some bolder colors like yellows and reds. Rockets get 3-4 feet tall. Knee Highs are about 2 ½ feet tall and can also bloom some through winter.

Foxgloves add a nice old fashioned look to the mix. Their spires reach 2-3 feet tall and come in soft pastel

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colors with interesting spots on the bell shaped flowers.

Poppies should mostly get mixed in near the front and also look good in small patches. They only reach 12-18 inches but deliver quite a punch of color in reds, oranges, and yellows.

Cutting type dianthus is also nice to add to the mix. Dainty flowers in pinks, fuchsias, and white can bloom all through the winter, spring, and into summer.

To liven up the bed during its dormant months, consider interplanting with pansies or violas. This will add some interest now as you patiently await the explosion of a beautiful spring cottage garden.

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