

Two New Flowers for the Winter Garden



Photo by Marie Harrison: Diascia is one of several new flowers that you may grow during the winter in our area.

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Here we go again. Little new flowers are on the market—or maybe they're not new and I have just become aware of them. I don't remember having seen them or heard of them until a couple of years ago.

Nemesia is the name of one of these latecomers. Last fall I found and bought only one plant of a cultivar named Blue Bird. That's not really like me. Usually I buy at least three, but since I was unfamiliar with this plant, I purchased only one. I expected it to wither and die with the first frost. Surprisingly it flowered all winter and well into the spring, and I wished that I had bought at least a dozen of them.

I planted the tiny plant in my sunniest area in a bed I had amended with organic matter. It was watered regularly by the sprinkler system. I was delighted by its compact habit and freely blooming nature.

This fall I have been persistent in my quest for more of these lovely plants. Luckily I found a blue Nemesia called Blue Berry at the Gourd Garden in Seaside . I also found a cultivar called Innocence at Niceville's Garden Center . I expect the same performance from these pretty specimens.

The diminutive plants grow to about 8 - 10 inches tall and have a similar width. Cultivars include Banana, Blue Lagoon, Candy Girl, Compact Innocence, and many others.

Plants are quite expensive at the nursery. I couldn't afford a whole bed of them, so I planted a few in a container where I can see them close up all during the winter. If I find them more reasonably priced, I'd like a bed of them. Flowers are vanilla scented and resemble miniature snapdragons on tiny light green leaves.

I also noticed that seed can be purchased from some of my favorite seed companies. This would surely be a better way to go if large numbers of plants are desired. They should be planted now. Since light is not required for germination, the seeds should be covered lightly. Seeds should germinate in about seven days.

Nemesia is a short-lived perennial. While it can take some frost, a hard freeze will kill the top and the plant will

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grow back with the return of milder days. Unfortunately, the plants are not tolerant of our summer heat, so we must grow them as winter annuals and prepare to replace them next spring.

Another little newcomer that must be tried is *Diascia*, or twinspur. This member of the snapdragon family is cold hardy to about 20 degrees F. or less. Trailing stems take root and rebranch to form broad mats. Blooming stems are held a few inches above the foliage. As the flowers start to fade, the plants can be cut back with scissors to about three inches above soil level and they will reflower. As a matter of fact, an employee at The Garden Gate in Gulf Breeze told me that if they were frozen to the ground that I should just cut them off at soil level and expect them to come back.

Unfortunately, only one *Diascia* was left by the time I made it to the nursery. I expect that they are available at other nurseries, so I must continue my search. Several colors are available, such as salmon, lavender, pink, and deep rose.

Both *Nemesia* and *Diascia* are versatile plants with many uses. Try them on the patio or balcony in combination planters, hanging baskets, or in landscape beds. Wherever you put them, they will delight you with flowers throughout the winter. They just might be a refreshing change from pansies and snapdragons.

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