

Cooler Weather Means Time to Plant Pansies

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO BY **William M. Johnson**

Pansies have become the most popular cool season annual used to provide a dependable winter and early spring color display for Galveston County landscapes and gardens. Plant them in large drifts or masses, or as pockets of color to brighten up a dreary winter landscape

The astronomical start to the 2015 fall season occurred on September 23 but one would not have known it to be fall judging from the temperatures thereafter.

The noticeably cooler temperatures and rainy weather that arrived over the weekend give hope that fall will finally begin to feel like fall, even in the Texas Upper Gulf Coast region. One of the benefits of living in the Texas Upper Gulf Coast region is that we can plant pansies

now for enjoyment in the winter landscape. Pansies are a remarkable annual capable of surviving our coldest winter temperatures then bouncing back with vigor when warm weather returns.

Pansies have become the most popular cool season annual used to provide a dependable winter and early spring color display for Galveston County landscapes and gardens. Their versatile use in the landscape, easy culture, and abun-

dant blooms make them quite worthy of their popularity.

Now through early December is the ideal time to be planting pansy transplants. Pansies require soil temperatures between 45 degrees and 65 degrees Fahrenheit for best growth. Pansies planted after soil temperatures drop below 45 degrees Fahrenheit show stunted, pale green leaves, little growth and little or no flowering. Cold-stressed root sys-



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tems are less efficient in taking up nutrients.

On the other hand, pansies planted too early and exposed to warm temperatures often appear yellow; the stems stretch and the new growth will appear as small rosettes at the ends of stems. As a result, the plants flower poorly and are more susceptible to frost damage or disease.

Even though they may look delicate, pansies are tough plants as they are one of the few flowers that withstand cold temperatures (down to the single digits) and still provide a spectacular show when temperatures warm up.

Pansies thrive during our mild winters. They will continue to provide blooms through the spring season which is their peak performance period.

Pansies should be located in areas that receive full sun or only partial shade. The soil should be well-turned to a depth of 8-to-10 inches and the addition of organic amendments, such as garden compost or composted manure is beneficial.

Pansies are susceptible to several root rot diseases and they require good soil drainage for optimal performance. Therefore, the bed level should be raised several inches above the existing ground to insure good surface drainage in areas that are not well-drained.

Pansies lend themselves to a

wide range of applications in the home landscape. They are popular in large formal plantings, as borders, and in planter boxes. They are also popular as background or fill-in annuals for spring bulbs. Their long season of bloom is excellent in providing rich, colorful blooms from the spring season to the bloom season of early summer annuals.

The pansy has one of the widest range of flower colors of any garden annual. Included in the wide color range are red, purple, blue, bronze, pink, black, yellow, white, lavender, orange, apricot and mahogany. Flowers may be single-colored, streaked, or blotched. Some flowers have petals with crinkled-ruffled edges, while others are smooth. The F1 hybrids offer an extended bloom time lasting well into spring due to their heat tolerance.

Today you will find a wide array of pansy varieties. Different breeding companies produce entire series of pansies, with names like Majestic Giants (one of my favorite series), Antique Shades, Nature, Matrix, Panola, Skippy, and Bingo, just to name a few. Each series sports varieties with and without faces.

Choose healthy, fresh plants for planting. Most transplants are sold locally in multi-pak units or by the individual plant. Purchase stocky plants with at least 4 to 5 strong leaves.

Space individual plants 6 to 10

inches apart to provide a solid mass of color. Be sure that the top of each transplant's potting mix is about 1/4 inch below the soil line. However, do not plant too deeply as the tender plants become more susceptible to root rot.

To keep pansies blooming profusely, fertilize lightly every month with a general purpose, complete fertilizer (such as 13-13-13) or a slow release fertilizer such as Osmocote. To maximize flower production, be sure to keep spent flowers pinched off.

Water the newly planted pansies well. Mulch pansy beds with shredded pine bark to provide a distinctive background contrast that enhances the green foliage and colorful flowers.

Pansies are easy to grow and will reward a homeowner's efforts with an abundance of color. There is a place for them in every Galveston County garden. Plant now and enjoy their smiling faces in your fall, winter, and early spring garden.

