

Pansies and Cyclamen

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There is still plenty of time to plant snapdragons, stocks, alyssum, ornamental kale, dianthus, and calendula in containers and flower beds for winter color but now that we have moved into November we can also plant the more heat avoiding pansies, cyclamen, primula and sweet peas.

Sweet peas are the most difficult winter annual to successfully establish. They do not like hot weather or cold weather so often we end up planting them more than once before we obtain a successful crop. Last year the February planted seeds produced a crop in my garden. The year before, the November seeds bloomed over a long season. It is worth the effort, however because sweet pea blooms are very colorful and have a wonderful fragrance. They are one of my favorite cut flowers.

Purchase sweet pea seed from your favorite nursery. Soak the seed in water over night and then plant them in full sun at the base of a trellis. Portable trellises work, or you can even use tomato cages. The taller, the better.

For deep shade consider cyclamen. All of the varieties form one-foot mounds of attractive heart-shaped leaves decorated with etchings. The orchid-like blooms are intense red, white, lavender, pink, purple or bicolor. Plant cyclamen in containers or beds. If temperatures are predicted to fall under 30degrees it is best to cover the plants with an agricultural fabric or sheet to protect the blooms and buds. Cyclamen are imported from cool weather states in the West and the price of about \$6 per plant reflects the long trip. They are expensive but before you reject them out of hand, take a look at them. Cyclamen is spectacular.

Primula also are expensive, and require full shade to thrive. One of the varieties grows low like pansies with showy leaves that are crinkly and Kelley green. The flowers are again pansy sized and shaped, but the colors are waxy red, blue, yellow, pink, purple, white and brown. They remind me of the show paint that clowns in the circus use to color their faces.

Primula work best in containers. Protect them from snails and slugs with a regular application of a bait.

For full sun in the winter it is hard to beat pansies and its cousins, violas and Johnny-jump-ups. They produce colorful flowers (yellow, purple, blue, violet, white, and orange) plus can tolerate cold spells. Expect the pansy related flowers to have blooms every day from now through the middle of May. They will survive temperatures into the low 20s without protection.

The regular pansy has monkey-faced blooms (dark-centers) and clear-faced blooms. The blooms vary in size from quarter sized to silver dollar sized, depending on the variety. Some varieties have a fragrance. The plants are generally one foot across and just as tall. They are good bedding plants, work well as borders and are exceptional container plants.

Violas are bushier than pansies with small nickel-sized blooms. Johnny0jump-ups have even smaller blooms. They are best when used in hanging baskets. Deer will eat all of the winter annuals (except snapdragons in some neighborhoods) but they are especially fond of pansies, violas, and Johnny-jump-ups. It is also advisable to use a slug and snail bait to protect the low growing plants.

The cool weather annuals described in this article require regular water and fertilization to make a good bloom show. Plant them in well-drained soil. Irrigate when the soil dries to one-half inch. Use Osmocote for fertilization for plants in containers. The product also works for bedding plants but “winterizer” or slow-release lawn fertilizer is a less expensive source of nutrients for plants in beds. Soluble fertilizers like Miracid, Miracle Gro, and Peter’s can be applied on a regular basis through the growing season.