**Pansies, Cyclamen and Spinach**

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Now that November has arrived, we are less likely to experience hot spells where temperatures exceed 90oF. That is important for some of our most spectacular winter bloomers. Pansies and cyclamen respond poorly to high temperatures. They may react to the hot temperatures by declining quickly.

Pansies are the most popular winter annual. They provide blue, yellow, white, purple and orange blooms everyday through the end of May if they are planted in full sun now. They have more cold tolerance than petunias, dianthus, calendula, stocks and even snapdragons, so there is usually no cold-weather break in blooming in January like the others experience.

Pansies are available in several varieties based on bloom size and color pattern. The most common selections are the monkey-faced pansies. They have a black center within the colored flower. The monkey-faced varieties offer blooms that are half-dollar sized. The Majestic Beauty variety offers a monkey-faced pansy that has a larger bloom, nearly twice as large.

Clear-faced pansies have become more and more popular in area gardens. Their blooms are also about half-dollar sized.

Gardeners that want a smaller bloom size can grow the pansy cousins Johnny jump-ups and violas. Johnny jump-ups have nickel-sized blooms of yellow or violet. Violas have quarter-sized blooms.

Grow pansies in full sun (at least 6 hours) in beds or containers. Mixed-color beds are the norm, but single-color beds are very showy. Pansies work well as a border planted around taller winter annuals. They are susceptible to slug and snail damage, so protect them with slug and snail bait.

Cyclamen have been used for years as an indoor plant. They are often given to patients in hospitals to distract and cheer them up. The plants, at first glance, look almost artificial with their dark green, waxy heart-shaped leaves that are decorated with silver etchings. The leaves are attractive and provide a perfect background for the spectacular blooms. The flowers are orchid-like in very pure colors of white, red, pink, purple, lavender and rose.

Cyclamen are surprisingly hardy as outdoor winter plants. The foliage is very cold tolerant. Cover cyclamen with agricultural fiber or blankets when temperatures fall below 30oF to maintain the blooms.

Grow them in deep shade and they will decorate your landscape with blooms every day until May when they decline with the heat. Use them in containers or beds in deep shade. Single-color plantings or drifts of single colors are the usual way to use cyclamen, but a bed of mixed white and another color is decorative.

The main complaint about cyclamen is the cost. A hundred cyclamen in a bed in the shade in front of the house are very showy, but at $6 per plant, you may have to refinance the house to afford them.

Cyclamen will live and bloom in the house for years, but they are hard to over-summer outside. Even if you can keep the foliage alive by storing them in containers in a corner of the yard, they are slow to re-bloom. The beautiful plants offered by your favorite nursery each winter are grown in Colorado or other cold-weather location.

Spinach is not a blooming plant, but has the same negative reaction to hot spells that affects pansies and cyclamen. Plant spinach transplants in the vegetable garden now to provide leaves for salads and vegetable dishes into May.

Spinach does not grow as fast as collards, chard and several of the other greens, so you usually need several plants to provide production for winter-long harvest.

My rule of thumb is to plant 6 spinach plants for each person in the household. They can be planted one foot apart in full sun. Fertilize with slow-release or winterizer lawn fertilizer every three weeks after planting (one cup per six plants).

Harvest spinach leaf by leaf as you need it, without ever taking more than one third of the foliage.