

More Plants for Winter Gardens

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We have discussed growing snapdragons, stocks, dianthus, ornamental kale, sweet peas, and calendulas in your winter flower garden. Now that we have reached November you can add pansies, cyclamen and primula to the list. We waited until November because these cool weather annuals are sensitive to the hot spells we often have in October.

Pansies and their close cousins' violas, and Johnny-jump-ups are among the most popular winter annuals. Pansies are available in clear face or monkey-faced versions with flower colors in many shades of yellow, purple, white, orange, blue and bi-color. The pansy blooms are usually about 2 inches in diameter. Violas and Johnny jump-ups offer nearly the same colors but with smaller flowers.

Grow pansies in full sun in flower beds and containers. They are very cold tolerant and are not subjected to a break in blooming like snapdragons in the coldest part of winter in January and February. Plants in the pansy family are a favorite deer snack so make sure there is a fence between the hungry browsers and these attractive winter bloomers. They don't eat as fast as deer, but snails and slugs will also feed on the low growing pansies, so be generous with the slug and snail bait.

Cyclamen has long been recognized as a spectacular plant for indoor blooms. The intense red, pink, white, and versions of lavender color presented above the waxy, etched foliage is a favorite "get well" plant for folks recovering at the hospital. In recent years it is being used more and more for decorating winter flower beds and containers in deep shade. Planted now, the blooms will be constant until the warm weather arrives in April. The colors can be mixed but the impact is most showy to me when cyclamen is planted in single color beds. Be prepared for "sticker shock" with the price of cyclamen. The color of the blooms and handsome foliage is unmatched but so is the price of individual plants!

The cyclamen foliage is unphased by the cold, but the blooms can be knocked off by temperatures colder than 28 degrees F. Have a piece of Insulate or other fabric ready to place over the plants in the bed if temperatures under 28 degrees are forecast.

Primula(primrose) have a growth habit like pansies (low and spreading) but in addition to growing in the shade, primula flowers are more intensely colored, and the foliage is crinkly. Use primula for containers and intimate gardening beds in deep shade. Primula are a favorite food for slugs and snails so have the slug and snail bait ready to apply and planting and every 2 weeks after planting.

In the vegetable garden spinach has the same sensitivity to hot spells that pansies, cyclamen, and primula have. It can also be planted now. Transplants are available in 2-inch peat pots and 4-inch containers. The smaller transplants are less expensive, but I like the larger plants because they start with a larger root system plus have more foliage to survive initial attacks by cutworms and snails.

Plant spinach transplants 6 to 12 inches apart and keep them well fertilized. Spinach is not as productive as chard, collards, kale and other greens so plant more to meet your family's needs. Twenty-four spinach plants are not too many plants to meet a small family's salad and casserole needs for the tasty nutritious vegetable.