

Transition from Winter to Summer Annuals

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The snapdragons are just going into their spring bloom period which normally means they will make their best show of the year over the next 4 weeks. Unfortunately, they are also showing rust symptoms which means that they may decline from the disease before they show their full bloom display. If you were able to stay ahead of the henbit and chickweed weeds in the bed, you may enjoy the full bloom period, but if the bed was infested with dense weed growth, the moist environment encouraged development of the rust disease. Once the rust develops there doesn't seem to be an effective treatment.

As disappointing as it is, the plight of the snapdragons makes the decision on when and how to transition to zinnias in the flower beds much easier. Enjoy the snapdragon blooms as long as they live but be ready for the transition within 2 or 3 weeks. Dreamland zinnia transplants are available at area nurseries now. They produce 4-inch red, yellow, pink, lavender, and crème colored mound-shaped blooms on 26-inch plants. Enjoy the showy blooms in the landscape and harvest some for cut flowers. Other zinnia transplants available at area nurseries are Zinnia Angustifolia (Mexican Zinnia) and the hybrid "Profusion". They are not as showy as the Dreamland zinnias but are more drought tolerant.

If you want taller zinnia varieties to supplement the Dreamland zinnias, obtain seeds of California Giant, Cactus, and Fireball blend to seed directly in the garden or start in 4-inch containers to be transplanted into the garden once they reach 6 inches tall.

Put potting soil in the 4-inch containers, fertilize each container with a scoop of Osmocote, soak the soil by setting the container in a shallow tub, and then press two of the zinnia seeds in the container. The seed will germinate in a week.

Prepare the flower bed for a new planting of zinnias or other hot weather annuals by adding 2 inches of compost and 10 cups of slow-release lawn fertilizer (19-5-9) per 100 sq. ft. of bed.

In addition to decorating the landscape and providing cut flowers, zinnias are an outstanding wildlife plant. The blooms provide nectar for hummingbirds and butterflies. If you let them go to seed, the lesser goldfinches, cardinals, Inca doves and other seed-eaters will harvest the seeds just as readily as sunflowers.

Another choice to replace cold weather annuals such as calendula and stock that are declining is vinca. Seek out the Cora selection for best disease resistance. Allyssum, pansies, and dianthus may last for another 2 months when they can be replaced with moss roses and purslane.

In the shade garden the cyclamen may last another 4 weeks through April before the warmer weather gets the best of them. Pentas may be a good replacement for the cyclamen. They are available in several heights (8 inches to 24 inches) with a choice of red, lavender, pink, and white blooms. They will provide continuous blooms from the planting through Thanksgiving when the cold weather arrives.