

Hot Weather and Cool Weather Color

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This is an exceptional time of the year in the garden. The hot weather annuals such as zinnias, moss roses, vinca, cosmos, marigolds, and purslane are blooming but so are some of the cool weather flowers. Snapdragon and pansy transplants are in bloom, but the showiest cool weather flowers are the petunias, dianthus, and alyssum. Ornamental kale, cabbage, calendula, cyclamen, and primula are at the nursery and fragrant stocks should show up soon. You can also plant sweet peas by seed.

It becomes a challenge of allocating space in flower gardens. Rate the blooms based on favored characteristics including quantity of cut flowers produced, longevity of the production, which produce the most attractive colors, and which produce the most fragrant flower.

In my case zinnias rate high even though they will not last much longer than Thanksgiving. They rate high because of the showy colors, and high volume of blooms for cut flowers, but mostly because they are a favorite nectar source for butterflies, especially the Monarchs migrating through San Antonio to their wintering ground near Mexico City.

Beyond the blooming zinnias some gardeners will provide space for the cosmos as another nectar source, and for the marigolds, and vinca as long as possible because of their showy colors.

When you are ready to shift to the cool weather annuals, snapdragons and stocks are the main zinnia replacements in the cut flower garden. There is an advantage in getting them established as soon as possible in the fall because if the weather cooperates, they will produce a fall bloom period before a January pause and then follow with an early spring bloom period. The tallest snapdragon selections such as Liberty and Rocket produce lots of colorful cut flowers even if they are not the favorite butterfly nectar source.

The favorite cool weather nectar sources seem to be dianthus, stock, alyssum, sweet pea, and calendula. Stock and sweet peas also make fragrant cut flowers. Grow stock from transplants from your favorite nursery, but sweet peas are most successfully grown from seed in full sun against a trellis.

Sweet peas have been cooperative the last several years and accepted the winter weather as neither too cold or too warm, and produced their intensely colored, fragrant blooms without having to reseed as has been necessary in past years. Obtain a seed pack from your favorite nursery, soak the seeds overnight and then plant them against a trellis. Tall tomato cages work well for the trellis. I don't know which of the fragrant cool weather annuals, stocks or sweet peas are my favorite, they are both great and worthy of growing in San Antonio gardens.

Pansies are not usually used as cut flowers, but they are the hardiest winter blooming flower. Expect them to have blooms every day through April and have the most cold tolerance. Petunias bloom until the first freeze and then pause like the snapdragons until early spring.

Primula and cyclamen grow and bloom well in the shade. The blooms are very showy with intense colors, Protect them from snails and slugs with slug and snail bait. Cyclamen should be covered with fabric for cold protection when temps are forecast to be under 30 degrees.