

SFA

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Pansy

Pansies are popular with gardeners for a very good reason- they are one of the few flowers that will continue to bloom throughout most of the winter! The big, beautiful blooms are very showy and come in such a wide variety of colors that it can be difficult to select your favorite. The following planting and care tips will help your pansies grow and bloom like crazy.

Pansies do not like hot weather, but can survive quite cold winters. Gardeners in warm climates should plant pansies in a sunny location in the autumn, whereas gardeners in cooler climates traditionally plant pansies in the spring and can expect them to last throughout the milder summers, given a bit of shade. Newer varieties of pansies have been bred to survive winter weather as cold as zone 4; check with your local garden center for recommended varieties in your area.

Prepare your soil for drainage and PH level. Pansies like well-drained soils with an addition of organic materials such as well-composted cow manure or soil conditioner. The PH level pansies prefer is approximately 5.5. Your garden center should sell PH test kits for just a few dollars and can help you determine the soil additives you need to achieve the proper PH.

Plant early, while the soil is still warm, if you are planting in the fall and want your plants to really thrive. Pansies need a chance to establish their root systems before the soil gets cold, preferably before the soil temperature reaches 45 degrees. In the zones 7 & 8, this means mid-September through mid-October is the perfect time for pansy planting. Check with your local garden center if you are not sure whether the time is right in your area. Pansies planted after the soil is cold won't begin to grow or bloom well until the next spring.

Space your plants properly. Pansies should be planted about 8 inches apart to provide room for growth and air circulation, which will discourage disease and fungal infection.

Fertilize as you plant with a special pansy food, which is a fine granular fertilizer made to work quickly and produce lots of blooms. Apply according to package directions and mark on your calendar when it is due to be re-applied. If you are not able to find fertilizer specifically made for pansies, look for a fertilizer with a high phosphate content (the middle number of the three) to promote blooming.

Water your pansies thoroughly after planting, and every two or three days until you notice new growth, then less frequently afterward. Learn to recognize the signs of thirst. Pansy leaves will develop a subtle greyish-whitish cast when they are thirsty, and they will begin to wilt. During the winter, established pansies survive with very little water, but you will need to keep an eye on them during excessively dry or windy weather.

Re-apply fertilizer in late winter to keep your pansies blooming until time to replace them with more heat-tolerant annuals. Pansies may wilt after a hard freeze, but will spring back quickly. They may take a break from blooming during periods of extreme cold or snow, but will make a quick come back as soon as the bitter weather breaks.

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