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GARDEN NOTES

PANSIES NO WIMPS TO WINTER WEATHER

By Dennis Hinkamp

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Pansies aren't wimps, they are a flower for all seasons. What other flower can be planted in the fall while in bloom, have flowers peak out of the snow during a winter thaw, show a multitude of colors in April and May, and still be beautiful in June and July?

According to Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist, pansies are related to violas which are believed to have been cultivated in Greece in the 4th Century B.C. The pansy, as we know it, began in Iver, Buckinghamshire, England, in the 1800s. Lord Gambier and his gardener William Thompson crossed various violas and then selected plants with fascinating color combinations and large blossoms. By the 1850s many different strains of pansies were available in Europe.

Since that time, Goodspeed says pansies have gained popularity throughout the world. By 1888 they were one of the most popular flowers in America. Breeding for new pansy varieties continues today, with the majority of the work being done in Germany, America and Japan.

He says there are three types of pansies. The most common has varied colored petals with a dark center, often called a "face." Pansies can also be a single clear color such as orange or blue, or have small black lines radiating from the center, much like its viola ancestor. Pansies have one of the widest ranges of color available in any flower. They come in black, white, red, blue, purple, yellow, orange, pink and all colors in between.

The bloom size can be large (4 1/2 to 3 1/2 inches), medium (3 1/2 to 2 1/2 inches), or what is known as a Floribunda (2 1/2 to 1 1/2 inches), Goodspeed says. The large-sized flowers have fewer blooms per plant than the Floribundas.

"My two favorite varieties include the 'Accord' and 'Majestic Giant' series," Goodspeed says. "The 'Majestic Giant' was the All-American winner in 1966, and is still very popular."

"The 'joker' series have a colorful medium sized bloom," he says. "It was introduced in 1990 when it garnered the All-American award winner. 'Jolly Joker' has a very distinguished purple color with a striking orange face. The plants are compact, only growing about 8 inches wide."

There are many popular Floribunda. Goodspeed says the latest to impress most growers

are the ‘Maxi’, ‘Padparadja’, and ‘Universal’ series. Most have a wide range of colors and are very prolific bloomers.

Pansies can be planted in the fall or spring, he explains. Getting them planted this time of the year encourages blossoming as soon as the snow melts in the spring.

“Pansies thrive in the cooler spring weather. These colorful flowers need plenty of water when the weather is hot. During cool periods, cut back on the water to prevent root rot or other problems.

“Buy stocky, dark green plants with no more than a few blossoms on them,” he says. “There should also be some buds on the plants for future blossoms. Look at the roots. They should be white and healthy—not root bound.”

Apply a 2-inch thick mulch around the plants after planting in the fall to conserve moisture and keep them cozy during the winter months, he advises. This will also help reduce weeds throughout the coming year. Fertilize pansies once growth starts in the spring.

Go to the garden centers this time of year to discover one of the many colors of pansies that enhances your home and garden's color scheme, Goodspeed says. Then, when that February thaw comes, watch for their faces to peek out from the snow, lifting your spirits and giving hope that spring is on its way

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