



COOL WEATHER FLOWER GARDENING

STARNOTE 305
October 2013

Why to do and when to do it

Many people don't consider flower gardens in fall because they believe it to be a short season. After all, winter is coming. Shrubs and trees go dormant and flowers don't do well in winter cold, right? Not exactly--winters in southwest deserts are traditionally mild. There are a surprising number of flowering plants that like cooler weather and tolerate severe cold snaps as well. Not only are there flowers that survive winter, but there are several that will blossom all winter and thrive in the cold weather.

How do you plant cool season flowers? Finding a spot with sunshine that you can also get a shovel into is a great start! Most colorful blooming flowers have much more tender roots than trees or shrubs so it is important that you have rich garden soil. Due to our poor native soil, it is best to add organic material like *Paydirt™ Planting Mix* or *Humus Gro*, with a liberal addition of *Dr. Q's® Gold Dust Starter Fertilizer*. Install your flowers, water with a solution of *Dr. Q's Plant Tonic*, fertilize monthly and enjoy! Container gardens are super too!

FAVORITE COOL SEASON (annual) VARIETIES:

Calendula is a compact plant with large yellow or orange flowers. It's good in masses, borders or containers. Clip spent flowers to encourage repeat blooming. At it's peak in late fall and early spring.

The following flowers will give you color all winter:

Carnation is very hardy, takes full sun and needs no protection in winter. Garden varieties normally seen as bushy, compact dwarfs, thrive under routine care. Shades range from scarlet through pink to white. Some are sweetly fragrant.

Cyclamen has unusual and beautiful blooms. It prefers light shade to filtered sun, is a low water user with good drought tolerance. Flowers range from white magenta, red and purple.

English Primrose is a classic, cool weather favorite that does very well in filtered sun to full shade. Large-leafed and compact, it has flower stems in rich colors of yellow, pink, purple and white. Plant in shaded areas where pansies, stock and kale would perform poorly.

Iceland Poppy has flowers that float above their foliage like brightly colored tissue paper. Colors in shades of pink, peach, orange, apricot and gold. Remove flower stalks to keep neat. Prettiest when grown alone.

Ornamental Cabbage and Kale are edible but prized for their deep colors of purple, pink and white. The colder the weather, the brighter the colors! Excellent in borders or masses; surround with smaller cool season flowers like pansies and violas. Plant smaller specimens in fall, larger sizes in winter.

Pansy is a very popular, tough little plant available in nearly every color imaginable! *Majestic Giants* have large flowers with "faces," the *Crown* varieties have vivid colors without faces. Plant these in fall through winter in any sunny spot. Not bothered by the coldest weather. Great in masses, borders or containers! Pick spent flowers and pinch back occasionally to keep compact shape.

Stock is an old fashioned favorite known for its strongly fragrant flowers. It blooms profusely in shades of purple, lavender, pink and white right through the winter and into late spring. *Midget* or *Green Leaf Stock* is a short variety with brighter flowers. *Trysomic* or *Seven Week Stock* is taller and bushier. Use the tall varieties for background color and shorter varieties as borders or mixers.

Viola resembles a miniature pansy with loads of purple, yellow or bicolor flowers atop pansy-like foliage. It's delicate, tough and attractive. Plant in borders or masses, or mix with other cool season flowers.

FAVORITE COOL SEASON (perennial) VARIETIES:

Dianthus is a member of the carnation family that makes perfect mounds of color in fall and spring. Deadhead after blooming. Shows nearly endless color varieties from deep red through pink, purple, white and bicolor. You'll even get summer blooms if the plant has some afternoon shade. In the winter Dianthus will stay green and healthy, but you are not likely to see many flowers. Will also grow well in part shade. Plant anywhere in the garden.

Snapdragon is a winter specialist! You will have blooms from September through May. Can survive summers if it develops deep roots or gets afternoon shade. Snaps are available in many colors and sizes; Dwarf varieties are excellent for masses, foregrounds and borders. Taller varieties work well as background plantings. All do well in containers. Self sows readily and produces endless color variations due to cross pollination.

HANDY COOL WEATHER TIPS:

Select your new plants carefully. Avoid root bound plants for best results. If roots seem tight or congested, loosen them slightly before planting.

Don't bury plant stems. Keep them above the surface when you plant. *Exception:* If Cabbage or Kale has a long stem, plant it so that the leafy head is resting on top of the mulch you added over the rootball.

Good drainage is important. Soil gives up water less readily in cool weather, so water less often. Cold, soggy soil means death to plants! Watering once a week when the weather is cool is usually plenty.

Fertilize regularly throughout the season. Scatter *Dr. Q's® Rose & Flower Food* around your plants every 4-6 weeks to promote continuous blooming.

Mulch the soil surface to protect roots from hard freezes and cool the soil as the weather gets hotter.

Pinch plants back and remove blooms (dead head) as needed to keep your flower bed neat and productive.

Water plants thoroughly before a cold snap to prevent them from becoming "freeze dried" in howling winter winds.

Don't forget Container Gardens for the Fall and Winter!

Visit our website www.starnursery.com for all your garden information and accessories.

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