

Pansies

One of the most popular flowers in the garden and around the home, pansies are a tough, fragrant and colorful flower that have several interesting characteristics. Pansies are one of the earliest blooming spring flowers and feature some of the widest color ranges of any garden annual. Pansy blooms are a single flower with five rounded petals that, depending on the variety, feature several different color patterns.

An ancestor of the viola family, the name pansy comes from the French word “pansée,” which translates to “thought,” because the flower resembles a human face that appears to be deep in thought.

In addition to being one of the earliest flowering spring plants, pansies are also known to re-bloom in late fall. Also, aside from the gorgeous color they provide to the landscape, pansies also have edible leaves and flowers which are high in vitamins A and C. Pansy flowers have been used to make syrup, honey, dyes, and are a colorful addition to any fresh salad. Most famously perhaps, Shakespeare wrote in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” of powder from a pansy flower being used to concoct a love potion.

Culture

A rather compact growing flower, pansies typically reach a height and width of 6-8”. Pansies love cool nights and the sunny days of spring and fall. They prefer locations where they receive morning sun, such as below the understory of trees or plantings facing North or East.

Bloom time for pansies is spring to early summer, with a re-bloom in the fall.

Pansies require a well drained soil and will grow best in a loose, rich, slightly acidic (6.0 – 6.2) soil.

Pansies do not do particularly well in a lot of heat. They will however, thrive in cooler temperatures and areas with some shade during hotter weather. Pansies have been known to survive light freezes and snow, but not for extended periods.

Planting

Pansies are ready for transplanting to the garden following the last frost date of the spring. When planting, space apart about 6” per plant and supplement the soil with organic matter. The addition of a granular or slow release fertilizer during planting may also improve the long term performance. Finally, water pansies thoroughly after planting to eliminate any air pockets and minimize transplanting stress.

Hardening Off

Although pansies are a cool weather plant, it is important that they receive extra attention during the spring and build up a tolerance to cooler temperatures before being placed outside full time. Remember, pansies purchased at Bennett’s are accustomed to being in a greenhouse and are very tender; therefore, they must be toughened up. This process is known as “hardening off” and is essential to the survival of the plant during the fluctuations of Indiana weather during the spring.

Prior to planting, leave your pansies outside, day and night, at temperatures above 38° F for about a week. If during that time, temperatures fall below 38° F, the plants should be brought inside.

Once your pansies are acclimated to these temperatures, it is ok to plant them, but it will still be important to keep your eye on the temperature. If it falls below 32° F during the day or below 38° F at night, cover the plant, or if in a container, bring the plant inside. When covering, use cardboard, paper, sheets or other cloth. Do not use plastic as this will not allow for proper air circulation. Be aware that if planted outside and the temperature falls into the teens, the plants may be lost.

Finally, make sure the plants are well watered during this period as this will keep the root systems active and less susceptible to freeze.

Pansies should be hardened off enough after a week or so outside to be able to handle 20° temperatures without being covered.

Maintenance

To extend pansies bloom time, watering should take place regularly, particularly during dry periods. For best results, make sure plants receive at least 1” of water per week

Deadheading pansies will encourage further blooms. Additionally, if pansies are allowed a period of rest during the hottest months of summer, the re-bloom in fall will be more prominent.

As with most long blooming annuals, pansies respond well to fertilizer. For best results, fertilize once every 3 to 4 weeks with a 5-10-5 fertilizer, following label directions.

Pansies are relatively free of any major pest or disease. Check for slugs during wet seasons, particularly if the pansy is located in a shaded area. Aphids should also be checked for regularly and can be eliminated by using insecticidal soap.

The most common problem associated with pansies is under watering. Thus, mulch is recommended for around the pansy. When watering, do so deeply and focus on the soil, not the plant foliage.

Uses

Due to their compact growth and appeal in both spring and fall, pansies can be a valuable addition to several parts of the landscape.

Their size makes them an ideal plant for placing along shrub beds, as a border among perennials, or for squeezing in other tight spots.

Pansies are also well suited for hanging baskets, as this allows them to be easily moved to cooler locations in the heat of summer while still getting the appropriate amount of sun.

Other uses for pansies include in an early spring window box or in a container combined with other annuals accenting entry ways. This will allow you to enjoy the aromatic value of pansies around the home.

Additionally, mixed in a perennial herb garden can be useful spot for pansies as this will emphasize their value beyond aesthetics and stress their potential as an edible flower.

We at Bennett's are here everyday to give "Helping Hand Hints" personally, one on one. Many gardening problems are very specific, and we couldn't possibly cover all aspects in these pamphlets. Any time you have a specific problem or need help, feel free to call. It's our job to help you be successful in your growing endeavors, and we thoroughly enjoy giving you a "helping hand."

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