

## Time to Plant Your Pansies

Nov 4, 2011

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If you're looking to add a little color into your flowerbeds this winter, pansies are a great option. With more than 300 cultivars available, you should be able to find a color that meets your needs. Planting time is critical for pansies, and it never fails that some stores start selling them too early for our warm fall weather, and folks like me get too excited and plant them too early. Pansies that are exposed to heat will often appear yellow and the stems will begin to stretch. They will also flower poorly and are more susceptible to disease if planted early.

The weather has cooled off enough to where this is a great time to plant pansies. In fact, I just finished up planting some this past weekend at our house. Here are some things to be cautious of when planting those pansies to make sure you have beautiful color during the winter months.

Pansies cannot tolerate wet soil. Make sure that when you're planting, that the soil is well drained and that you've removed any clay and replaced with a good planting soil. If necessary, you can plant pansies in a raised bed that will improve drainage and will also increase the visibility of the flower.

You should check the pH of your soil, since pansies prefer a pH of 5.4 to 5.8. If you haven't had a soil test done in the area the pansies would be planted in the last two years, bring a sample by the Extension office and we can get you results in about a week. You should not apply lime to pansies unless the soil test recommends it. Basic soil samples cost \$8 each.

You should plant pansies with six to ten inches of spacing between them. Planting at six inches will result in a fuller appearing bed, but may become crowded and more susceptible to insect and disease problems. Once you've planted and watered them, place mulch such as pine straw or wood chips to the soil surface taking care not to cover or damage the plants.

You should remove spent blossoms from the plants throughout the growing season. This is known as "deadheading." This will help encourage branching and improve flowering. This will also prevent insect and disease problems and improve visibility of the flowers. When fertilizing, make sure you find a fertilizer that uses a nitrate source of nitrogen. Nitrate will provide adequate nitrogen in cold soils this winter. Just look on the label of whatever fertilizer you're interested in to find out how the nitrogen is formulated.

Pansies are a great option for color from winter through spring. With just a bit of work, you should have a great bed of pansies to get you through the cold months ahead. We have more information available on planting pansies at the Madison County Extension office. Just come by or give us a call at 795-2281.