



Get Ready for Winter Color

One of the advantages of our climate is that we can have bright, colorful flowers in our gardens all winter long. Late September or early October is a good time to start getting ready to plant winter flowers as temperatures will soon begin to sink following the hot summer weather. The time to plant is when daily temperatures are consistently lower than 100 degrees. Plan to begin preparing beds up to two weeks ahead of planting time.

Soil preparation is essential to growing winter annuals successfully. Make sure your planting bed is well drained. Then, add organic amendments such as peat moss or compost. A variety of mulches for this purpose are generally available at a local home improvement store. Spread about a 4" layer of the mulch over the bed and mix it into a depth of 12 inches. Fertilizer and sulfur can be worked into the soil at the same time. Use Sulfur-coated urea or ammonium phosphate (16-2-0) at 1-3 pounds per 100 square feet of bed area and 3 pounds of sulfur per 100 square feet.

When your soil is ready, you can contemplate which varieties of flowers you want to plant. Calendulas, Geraniums, Pansies and Petunias are some good choices that grow well in winter in the low desert, but there are many others as well. Sweet Alyssum and Lobelia are best for borders around the edge of your flower beds. At the nursery, select the healthiest plants you can find. Younger plants are generally a better choice than tall, leggy plants that have already spent a long time in the container. Naturally, you should choose flowers that are suited to the sunlight available at the location of your flower bed (full sun, partial sun, constant shade).

Prior to planting, water the bed well. Plant when the soil is still moist, but not saturated with water. Do not plant too deep! The stem of the flowers should be at the same depth in the bed as it was in the container. You may want to carefully open the sides of the root ball with your fingers to promote quicker root growth into the soil of the bed. Water the bed well immediately after planting and continue to water daily. In some sunny spots, you may want to water at least twice a day as long as temperatures remain high. As the winter progresses, you should reduce water accordingly. Lastly, apply a pre-emergent to the bed for weed control. We suggest Preen, a brand that can be found at most gardening stores.

To maintain a good looking flower bed throughout the winter, it is best to fertilize monthly with ammonium phosphate. You will also need to "deadhead" the flowers as their blossoms fade. To do this, pinch the faded blossom off the stem right at the base of the flower. This will keep the bed looking fresh and also promotes the growth of new blossoms.



Yellow & Purple Pansies, Calendulas and SnapDragons

