



# COOL WEATHER FLOWER GARDENING

STARNOTE 305  
October 2013

## *Why to do and when to do it*

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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 So! 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 flower that survive winter, but there are several that will flower 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 of the colorful blooming flowers have much more tender roots than trees and shrubs. So, it is important that the soil you plant into is good. Often Native soil is so poor it is difficult to use for planting these. In this case, use Peat Moss or Filthy Rich Potting soil to surround the plants. Make the holes extra wide so the roots can spread out.

You'll want irrigation to them for the upcoming summer, and if your soil isn't so bad you can improve it by adding about 25% to 30% organic material like *Paydirt™ Planting Mix* or *Humus Gro*. Mix these in "do not plant directly into straight unmixed active organics like these. They are meant to be mixed. Always add a starter fertilizer like *Dr. Q's® Gold Dust*, and a transplant shock reducer like *Dr. Q's® Plant Tonic* to assure the best chance for success then just plant, water, fertilize monthly and enjoy! Container gardens are super!

### **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.

These flowers will give you color all winter:

**Cyclamen** has one of the most unusual and beautiful flowers. It can bloom in a location that only has indirect sun. Low water use and drought tolerant is another of it's characteristics. Blooms range from white, magenta, red and purple.

**English Primrose** is a classic, cool weather favorite that does very well in light 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 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 flowers. Will also grow well in part shade. Plant anywhere in the garden.

**Carnation.** **Very hardy, takes full sun – 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.

**Snapdragon** is a winter specialist! You will have blooms from September through May. Can survive summers if given deep roots or 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 roots.** Keep them at 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 (Dead-Head) and remove blooms** 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!

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