

Adding Winter Color to Central Florida Yards

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As the weather begins to cool, fall is the perfect time to add color to your yard and landscape. While some of our more tropical plants will require extra care to get through cool night time temperatures, there are many annual flowers that will flourish in the cooler, dryer weather. Homeowners will find great success during our Florida winter months by simply selecting the correct plants for this time of year. It can be difficult, however, to pick out the correct cool season flowers from the out of season plants that may still be offered at garden centers and this publication will be a great tool in finding the best plants.

Before purchasing plants, decide on the best location for your flowers. Whether in large pots on your porch or balcony, or planted in flower beds around your yard, these sites should be chosen beforehand so that you can buy the appropriate number of plants. Fresh potting mix should be added to containers and soil in flower beds should be well cultivated and amended if necessary. It may be helpful to think about the colors



Figure 1. *Viola* flowers.

Watering your plants after planting will be very important. Even as temperatures begin to drop, don't forget to make sure to water your flowers and gardens sufficiently. Watering restrictions limit us to one irrigation cycle per week during daylight savings time, however hand-watering is exempted from this rule and may be necessary to keep your flowers and containers hydrated through the winter.

Fertilizing with a slow-release fertilizer will help provide nutrients throughout the season, and water soluble fertilizers can also be applied on a more frequent basis to encourage healthy growth. **Weeding** may also be necessary to help keep plants vigorous. Small weeds are easier and less damaging to remove than large weeds, so staying on top of this will reward your efforts. **Pruning** your plants can include both pinching and deadheading: pinching is a light pruning that will reduce the size of the plant and encourage more branching, deadheading removes spent blossoms and helps the plant to focus energy into creating more flowers rather than seeds.

For flowers that love the cold, pansies and violas can't be beat. Also known as Johnny-jump-ups, these flowers come in almost every color and many varieties feature two colors making up the "face" of the flowers (see Figure 1). They will bloom throughout the

entire winter, regardless of cold or freezing temperatures, and just a couple of fertilizer applications will keep them flowering into May.

Other favorites for the winter include the silver foliage of dusty miller, the soft white flowers of sweet alyssum and the old fashioned favorite, geraniums. Snapdragons will add tall spikes of color, and new varieties have plants ranging from twelve to 24 inches tall in almost every color of the rainbow. Petunias are another staple for winter gardening, and these flowers will look great trailing from a hanging basket or simply planted on their own. For those feeling a little more daring, ornamental cabbages in either purple or white will provide a bright splash of color in any flower bed or container.

Table 1: Annuals Flowers for Winter Color in Central Florida

Common Name	Sun Exposure	Earliest Planting	Typical Removal	Spacing (inches)	Typical Colors
Alyssum		October	June	10-12	White, Purple
Baby's Breath		October	June	12-16	White, Pink
Calendula		October	June	8-10	Orange, Yellow
Calibrachoa		October	May	18-24	Many colors
Carnation		November	May	8-10	Red, White, Pink
Delphinium		November	April	12-14	Blue, Purple
Dianthus		October	May	10-12	Red, White, Pink
Dusty Miller		October	September	12	Silver
Geranium		October	When declining	16-24	Many colors
Kalanchoe		October	July	12	Red, Orange, Pink
Lavender		October	June	24	Purple, Blue
Ornamental Cabbage		October	April	12-18	Purple, White
Pansy		December	May	10-14	Many colors
Petunia		October	May	12-24	Many colors
Snapdragon		October	May	10-15	Many colors
Strawflower		October	June	12-14	Orange, Yellow, White
Viola		October	May	8-10	Many colors

Full Sun Partial Sun/Partial Shade Full Shade

Sun Exposures shown are in order of preference. For example, would show that a plant prefers full sun but would still grow well in partial shade.