

Annuals to warm Southern winters

In warmer zones, whether moist or dry, winter can be as colorful as summer when you use annual plants.

By NANCY STAIRS/ Technical Editor

Establishing an ornamental landscape which retains visual interest during the winter can be a challenge, particularly in the northern climates. However, in areas where winters are warmer and milder, the choices increase. Here the use of annuals and herbaceous plants to add color during winter months is one option which can add to the visual appeal of the landscape.

Selecting the right annuals to provide that color is essential. The cool-season annuals grow best in cool soils and mild temperatures, and will grow from fall through winter in more southerly areas. Naturally, what is available and what performs best in your particular area will vary depending upon your local climate, as moisture and humidity can also have an

effect on how well plants do. Most of the choices here can be considered as reliable standards; other appropriate selections for your area should be available from your local nurseries.

Snapdragons (*Antirrhinum majus*) - bloom best when temperatures reach 70°F; extent of bloom period may depend on location but can expect blooms until early December and then re-plant in the spring (Zones 7 & 8).

Kales (*Brassica oleracea*) - a colorful foliage plant which is not resistant to a hard freeze, this plant does well in full sun.

Pansies/Violets (*Viola* spp.) - a reliable performer in a broad range of climates (moist to dry), as long as the temperatures are mild.

Carol Hooks, Post Properties horticulturist, in Atlanta, GA, also uses English daisies (*Bellis perennis*) as annuals, and Iceland poppies (*Papaver nudicaule*). On their Florida properties where she finds it is too warm for pansies. Petunias are a mainstay, as are dianthus and salvia (*Salvia farinacea* 'Blue Bedder'). For their properties in Tennessee and

'Baby Lucia' violas and 'Champagne Bubbles' poppies at a Post Properties location.





This arrangement combines 'Lemon Chiffon' violas, 'Crystal bowl' pansies, golden oregano and 'Bowie's Mauve' erysimum.

Washington D.C. she relies mainly on very hardy pansies and violas and some kale. They also cover the flowers when temperatures drop below 15°F.

According to information from the Florida

Cooperative Extension (www.hammock.ifas.ufl.edu/txt/fairs/39434) the three different climates of Florida must be considered when using annuals for winter color. Petunias, pansies and snapdragons that grow well and flower under cool night temperatures (45-65°F) should be planted in

the fall, winter and early spring. Geraniums and begonias can usually survive the low temperatures of south and central Florida. They are actually perennials that look best if treated as annuals.

In Texas, Mark Whitelaw, Landscape Consulting Services, Ft. Worth, Texas (www.markw.com/previous.htm) also uses these plants as annuals (although some may be perennials in some places): Dianthus or pinks (*Dianthus chinensis*) which will continue to bloom if seed-heads are removed; sweet pea (*Lathyrus odoratus*) as a climbing vine but be sure to get the annual not the perennial, *L. latifolius*, which will not bloom until spring; sweet alyssum (*Lobularia maritima*) a low growing annual; stock (*Matthiola incana*) which will bloom all winter in southern portions of Zone 8 and early spring in Zone 7; primrose (*Primula sp.*) will take sun or shade; and dusty miller (*Senecio cineraria*), another foliage plant but with a silver-gray color.

On the West Coast, where winter can be wet but mild you can also consider stock which can do well in the cold and damp. Nasturtiums (*Tropaeolum majus*) prefer less moisture and require little work, Iceland poppies can bloom until June and should withstand wind, rain and cool temperatures. Wax begonias (*Begonia spp.*) don't take the frost but do well in sun and shade. Sweet alyssum and primroses are also good choices.

For chillier climates

For those of us who live where winters are generally not so mild, shrubs and trees are the best bet for winter color and visual interest. In addition, plants which can provide food or cover for overwintering birds are appealing in a winter landscape. Some examples:

Form/Branching - corkscrew willow (*Salix matsudana* 'Tortuosa'); Kentucky coffeetree (*Gymnocladus dioica*); dogwoods (*Cornus spp.*); persimmon (*Diospyros americana*)

Bark - lacebark elm (*Ulmus parvifolia*); paperbark maple (*Acer griseum*); lacebark pine (*Pinus bungeana*); stewartias (*Stewartia spp.*); birches (*Betula spp.*)

Shoot color - red osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea*); Tatarian dogwood (*C. alba*); some Japanese maples (e.g. 'Senkaki')

Fruit - some crabapples (e.g. 'Golden Hornet', 'John Downie'); evergreen and deciduous female hollies (*Ilex spp.*); cotoneasters; Russian olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*); sourwood (*Oxydendrum arboreum*)

Deciduous conifers - larch (*Larix spp.*); dawn redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*); baldcypress (*Taxodium distichum*)



Poppies add a bright colorful touch at another Post Property location.