



Pansies, violas provide long season of splendor

By Norman Winter
special to The Star

Most local garden centers are loaded with fresh bedding plants to give you months of cool-season color and splendor. Pansies, violas, snapdragons, dianthus, flowering kale, cabbage and a host of others are waiting for you to give them a home in your gardens.

Pansies, of course, are the favorites, and rightfully so. You'll likely be buying 4- to 6-inch transplants that will offer bloom and performance until the high heat of late spring or early summer takes them out.

If I asked you to name a pansy, you would probably say Majestic Giant. This series has been around a long time and has been steadily improved. New, large-flowered varieties like the Matrix and Colossus have started eating into Majestic Giant's market share. All are good performers.

The Mammoth series is new this year. It is an extremely large-flowered variety boasting several colors, and each has a unique name. One of my favorites at the trials was On Fire, which gives that illusion with its fiery yellow, orange and red blooms.

Perhaps you are toying with the idea of going with violas this year, but are wondering if you can develop a landscape sizzle with these smaller-flowered cousins of the pansy. Let me put the answer in simple terms for you - absolutely.

The viola is an incredible powerhouse of blooming potential. I'll explain potential in a

minute. There are many good varieties in the marketplace. I love the Sorbet and Penny series, and the new trailing selections like the Rebelina.

If you could see the Floral Power series, you would want them as well. The name Floral Power really says it all. This variety produces blooms that are larger than a nickel and not quite as big as a quarter, but in a quantity that stops traffic.

The Floral Power Cream with Purple Wing is stunning in every aspect from performance to fragrance. The name doesn't quite do it justice, as you will see some deeper yellow and whiskers in the center.

The Floral Power Super Blue Beacon has slightly larger flowers. It offers a truly unique color combination of light blue with a darker blue halo, a spot of yellow in the center with whiskers, and a bold copper bronze on the bottom.

Like pansies, the viola can be partnered with snapdragons, kale, cabbage or mustard, and dianthus.

Let me explain what I said earlier about the viola's blooming potential. We have been inundated with rain in my part of the state and most likely in yours, too. Neither winter annuals nor summer-blooming perennials can tolerate sitting in cold, wet winter soil.

If you are not already planting on raised beds, start doing so and it will change your life from the standpoint of garden success. In our trials, we found that incorporating peat into the soil as a process of building up the



bed paid huge dividends in performance.

Whether you use peat, humus from your pile, cotton burr or mushroom compost, the results will help you garner the green thumb now and in the spring.

Feed pansies and violas monthly during their long, active growing season. These cool-season troopers will reward you as they are among the best buys for your garden dollar.

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