

## Sweet alyssum and pansy create fragrance fantasy

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Gardeners can rejoice since it is pansy-planting time across much of the country. While this is a good thing, the question is always asked, "What do I plant with them?"

One of my favorites to partner with pansies is sweet alyssum. No matter where you live in the country, at some time during the year you can grow both pansies and alyssum together for a magnificent olfactory experience.

I have always wondered why this little tiger of a plant has not found more favor in the garden. New varieties like the Clear Crystal series have made this plant even more of a must-have in the cool-season garden.

Let's do a little botany lesson first. Sweet alyssum is known scientifically as *Lobularia maritima*. It is from the Mediterranean region and is grown as an annual across most of the country. It is in the brassica family, meaning it is related to cabbage, similar to two other great fragrant, cool-season plants, stock and *erysimum*.

Clear Crystal is a fairly new tetraploid series of sweet alyssum. Words like tetraploid and diploid can get confusing really fast. What this means for you as a gardener, however, is that Clear Crystal is packed with vigor and has large flowers, a big improvement in the sweet alyssum. My favorite is the Clear Crystal Purple, but you are sure to be happy with the lavender, white and mix selections.

You'll want to plant them in full sun beds with fertile, organic-rich soil that drains well with the inevitable winter rains. Space your plants 6 to 10 inches apart, knowing they will spread close to 14 inches and reach about 6-10 inches tall.

In the landscape, think of them as being a front-of-the-border plant combined with pansies, snapdragons, cabbage or kale, dianthus and *erysimum*. You'll find them blooming a lot longer than you thought, with only intense heat causing them to relinquish their beauty and fragrance.

Because of their wonderful spreading habit, you'll notice they have the ability to soften the harsh, straight edges along a sidewalk or driveway. As they creep over the edge, you'll find yourself suddenly having curves.

As great as they are in the landscape, you may love them even more in a container. The rim of your container will disappear as the glorious, fragrant little flowers tumble over the edge. In a container combined with an ornamental grass and pansies, you'll find them intermingling with the foliage of the other plants.

Pansies offer enticing fragrance, and when combined with sweet alyssum, you've created a container that you'll want to place prominently on your porch, patio or deck, or perhaps by the front door so you can enjoy the heavenly aroma every time you go outside.

Cool-season flowers are actively growing now. While we think to water and fertilize our plants in the spring and summer, we sometimes overlook this practice during the cool season. Should rains become sparse, add supplemental water when necessary. A little water-soluble fertilizer applied a couple of times during the growing season will pay dividends, and have you relishing the beauty of your pansies and partners.



(top) Sweet alyssum is a little tiger of a plant. New varieties like the Clear Crystal series have made this plant even more of a must-have in the cool-season garden.

(middle) Clear Crystal sweet alyssum is partnered with a Lemon Fizzleberry pansy for a jolt of color.

(bottom) Clear Crystal Lavender Shades is a new variety of sweet alyssum that is a terrific cool-season flower. (Photos by Norman Winter)

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