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Pansies provide winter color

Winter is right around the corner, and many Mississippians are starting to put their gardens to bed, waiting for the warm days of early spring. But just

because it is getting colder doesn't mean we must have drab landscapes. Now is the perfect time to put some winter color in gardens, and I'm not talking about ornamental cabbage and kale.

I am sure you have seen brightly colored pansies while visiting your favorite garden center, and those pansies are a great way to add color to your winter garden.

They are tough, cold tolerant and flower almost nonstop.

Pansies are known botanically as *Viola wittrockiana* and have a 4- to 10-inch tall, mounding growth habit.

There are many different cultivars and selections in a virtual rainbow of colors. Older selections have multicolored flowers ranging from yellow and purple to blue and white. The color blotches can make the flowers appear to have faces. These faces seem to give the pansies playful, jovial personalities.

A newer pansy mix that has performed well in Mississippi is the Coastal Sunrise mix from the Matrix series.

The Coastal Sunrise plants are loaded with large, colorful flowers. The flowers are held high above the plant and are a terrific landscape display. The plants branch quickly, increasing the number of flowers.

A newly developed and really incredible pansy has been introduced this year.

Called Plentifall, these pansies have a spreading and trailing growth habit.

They are vigorous growers that should have good winter hardiness in Mississippi. They are perfect for use in hanging baskets and are a great spiller plant for fall and winter combination baskets.

Consider combining them with either poinsettia or cyclamen in patio containers for the upcoming holiday season. Plentifall pansies are available in local garden centers, but the supply may be limited this year.

When planting pansies in the landscape, prepare the soil as you would for summer-flowering annuals. Amend the soil with organic matter and add a couple of pounds of a good, controlled-release fertilizer to maintain nutrition for the extended garden performance of pansies. Keep the planting beds evenly moist, even in the winter cold.

Pansies may be the perfect winter-flowering annual.

The plants can freeze solid and thaw with little damage. Cold weather may cause the leaves to get a slight purplish tinge, and the flowering will slow down or stop completely.

But once it gets a little warmer, the flowering will get revved up again.

Gary Bachman, is an assistant research professor of horticulture at the Coastal Research and Extension Center in Biloxi.