

Pick a pepper for a festive display

By **NORMAN WINTER**
McCLATCHY-TRIBUNE
NEWS SERVICE

To give your garden a festive fall atmosphere, find a prominent place to put in ornamental peppers. Their blooms are not noteworthy, but varieties like Sweet Pickle and Garda Tricolore have fruit that will show off like Christmas lights.

Ornamental peppers leap off the garden center shelves this time of the year. If you love them in the fall, try growing them all season.

In trials, I've been mesmerized by Sweet Pickle. There are several I like, but this pepper is different. It has fruit that is 2 inches long and reminds me of the big, bold Christmas tree lights we used to have before we started using miniature versions.

Many ornamental peppers are edible, and a lot of them are flaming hot. Sweet Pickle, as its name suggests, is sweet. It loads up with a bounty of red, orange, yellow and purple fruit all at once.

A compact plant, it's perfect for the landscape or vegetable garden. Its large fruit can be seen from a great distance, making it a landscape asset.



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HOT, AS IN POPULAR: Garda Tricolore peppers resemble smaller Christmas lights. It produces scores of peppers that start purple then change to cream, orange and red.

Garda Tricolore, another exceptional pepper, originates from a source in the Netherlands and is hot. It, too, resembles Christmas lights but on a smaller

scale. Don't let the word "smaller" deter you, however, because what it lacks in size it makes up for in quantity.

Garda Tricolore produces scores of peppers that start purple then change to cream, orange and red. They're almost as long as Sweet Pickle but not as wide.

Also don't miss an opportunity to grow Black Pearl, Calico and Purple Flash — along with other ornamental peppers you may find at your garden center. They're great companions for asters, mums and late season marigolds, sunflowers and zinnias.

Whether you plant now or in the spring, grow ornamental peppers much as you would bell peppers. Before removing them from their containers, dig their holes in the garden soil. Plant it at the same depth it is presently grow-

ing.

Feed peppers with a complete garden fertilizer, preferably one higher in phosphorous, such as a 10-20-10. Apply 2 tablespoons per plant at three- to four-week intervals. You can dilute a water-soluble fertilizer every other week if you prefer — or if you're growing them in a container.

Keep your plants watered and mulched through the long growing season, and they will give you an unflinching performance.



ROB CARDILLO

COMPANION PLANTS: 'Black Pearl' ornamental peppers go well with asters and mums.