

THE WINDSOR STAR

Petunias will surprise you with their vigour, longevity

By Norman Winter, McClatchy News Service



Petunias will be an asset for your garden, and they will also help you create dazzling planters.

Rhythm and Blues petunia may forever change your mind on flowers with picotee edges. This riveting blue petunia is a stunner and will leave visiting neighbours aching in jealousy.

You may be thinking petunias aren't the longest blooming flowers in the garden. While this might be true, I assure you that there is a time in your garden where petunias will thrive, producing flowers that border on the spectacular.

Rhythm and Blues is a mounding, trailing petunia, packing a bounty of flowers that have a rare icy-blue colour with a white picotee edge. It is a vegetatively produced petunia that will surprise you with both its vigour and longevity in the landscape. Though touted for the landscape, Rhythm and Blues will also offer you the opportunity for creating extraordinary baskets and dazzling planters.

When choosing a companion, think about using complementary orange African marigolds or white selections of tall salvia farinacea. Both also offer months of blooming performance.

Another new petunia that is causing quite a stir is Pinstripe. The notoriety is coming from trials where consumers and producers alike are ranking it among the winners. I'll admit I have never been much of a striped kind of guy when it comes to flowers, but this petunia definitely caught my eye.

Pinstripe is also vegetatively produced and is unique in that it is such a dark purple that it is almost black, and sports a thin creamy white star pattern.

Black Velvet offers the same colour minus the stripes. Its habit is a little more upright and less spreading. Consider yellow or cream-coloured large African marigolds as partners.

Though these are bountiful bloomers, soil preparation will be the key to your happiness with these new petunias. If you look at commercial landscapes, you'll quickly note petunias are not being planted in tight, heavy clay. In fact, they are more likely to be planted in raised beds where a planting mix was used. If you are not going to use a planting mix, take the time to incorporate three to four inches of organic matter and till to a depth of about 20 centimetres.

As you do this, add about 1.5 kilograms of a slowrelease fertilizer per 10 square metres. I prefer a 12-6-6 formula with minor nutrients, though petunias will never know the difference. Be sure to use a slowrelease form of nitrogen.

You will also need plenty of sun and of course supplemental water during prolonged dry periods.

Once you have planted your petunias, apply a good layer of mulch to keep those summer soil temperatures moderate and prevent rapid loss of moisture due to evaporation.

Feed with light, frequent applications of a slowreleased fertilizer about every month.

Plant them in bold drifts with a sufficient quantity to make a landscape impact.

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