Snapdragons, asters, pansies brighten up autumn

BY JOHN O'CONNELL Copley News Service

When crisp autumn weather arrives, gardens can still blossom with color as heatloving annuals like vincas, petunias and impatiens fade from the landscape. And fall's color palette goes far beyond mums.

"Most people are unaware of the variety of flowers available to provide color when the petunias die off," said horticultural technician Genny Gibbs. "And many gardeners make the mistake of pulling out flowers from their gardens that really start blooming in

Snapdragons, for instance, bloom vigorously in spring, languish in the heat and then find a new birth of beauty as they are covered

with colorful spikes in cool autumn days.

By buying fall-blooming annuals and perennials your landscape and garden can be colorful during the cold months. Some popular fall bloomers are asters, carnations, pansies and sedums. A mainstay of fall gardening are asters. They are available in a variety of colors, including white, pink, purple and blue flowers. Brightcolored pansies are particularly tough in cold weather.

"There are lots of pansies in the garden centers with a variety of colors," Gibbs said. "They will bloom in fall until frozen solid. Pansies take a lot of cold. I've had pansies bloom at Christmastime when we had a couple of warm days. That's really a welcome

sight. And the good thing about pansies is they will bloom again in early spring."

Dusty Millers, with their silvery-green foliage, are great plants to complement pansies, Gibbs added.

Linda Quiram, a member of the horticulture team at D.A. Hoerr & Sons in Peoria. Ill., said sedums are especially good plants for fall. Sedums are fleshy-leafed, succulent plants with flattopped flower clusters of vellow, rose and pink.

Gardeners may also want to include some of the ornamental grasses to add color. shape and texture to a fall garden, Quiram said. One particularly colorful grass is "Rubrum," a purple fountain grass. It is noted for its rich, burgundy-colored

foliage and flowers with red and purple blooms.

"This grass will grow 2 to 3 feet high, and provides lots of winter interest with snow on the foliage," Quiram said. "Rubrum is an annual. Gardeners replant it every year, because there is not a perennial ornamental grass that has its dramatic color.'

A popular perennial grass is Shenandoah, which has green leaves with red tips in fall. Shenandoah is about 5 feet tall with seed heads that are burgundy color.

Some other colorful fall blooms include:

■ Monkshood: A perennial plant that has a spike of big flowers that resemble big snapdragons. Its blue-purple flowers are hooded. It does well in shade and blooms in the fall.

■ Begonias: "Begonia, both tuberous and fibrous. really perk up in cold weather," Gibbs said. "Their colors really intensify in fall."

■ Strawflowers: "These are the classic fall type of flower with beautiful warm colors - gold and orange with a little bit of burgundy," Gibbs said. "Strawflowers are also good for cutting and drying.'

■ Zinnias: With a wide variation in heights, form and color, zinnias can be used for borders or colorful backdrops.

■ Celosia plumosa "Fresh Look Red": This plant has fire-engine red plumes. For a little garden color,

good taste and fun, too, consider planting ornamental peppers or ornamental cabbages. The chili peppers are

planted in early spring and bear numerous long, skinny, bright red peppers in fall.

"The peppers aren't just another pretty face," Gibbs said jokingly. "You can eat

them. They are very sweet." Ornamental cabbages have ruffled leaves and colors from white to pale yellow. The leaves are very tasty, the horticulturist said.

Nasturtiums are also among the stars of fall. They spread quickly and have an ocean of brightly-colored blossoms that resemble tiny water lilies.

"Nasturtiums bloom in mid-summer, but really come on in the fall," Gibbs said. "They have colors of bright yellow, orange and reddish orange. And if you get hungry, you can eat the

Disputes don't have to lead to lawsuits between homeowners and contractors

BY DAVID BRADLEY

The Associated Press

In a society where "see you in court" rolls off the tongue as easily as a simple hello, it's no surprise consumers and contractors often embroil themselves in home improvement brouha-

The litany of wrongs lousy work, fiscal malfeasance, missed deadlines shifts the focus from busy work sites to the legal sys-

But are lawsuits the court of last resort? No, says a real estate attorney, but if

things tilt that way, homeowners better have their ducks in a row, starting with a contract.

"You need a contract regardless of project size," suggested Gregory Kenyon, who hopes clients stay out of court rather than in it. "Get most points in writing so both sides have a clear understanding of the work to be done."

Those points include expectations, materials, start and stop dates, and what Kenyon terms as "logical checkpoints" when portions of work should be done and thus trigger payments to the contractor.

Tack on clauses naming arbitration and mediation as remedies to avoid court time. Arbitration involves a decision by a third party; Kenyon prefers mediation. "Mediation allows the parties to settle disputes by themselves as opposed to a third party decision which makes everyone unhappy," said Kenyon.

Another significant inclusion: change orders.

"Added costs sneak up on people," said Kenyon. "Onehundred dollars here, \$100 there, it can add up to thousands of dollars. Both sides

need to sign off on changes."

A contract is more than a homeowner security blanket. Document details are a safety net for contractors.

"Regardless of the perception, contractors want to satisfy their customers," said Kenyon. "If the homeowner says 'you didn't give me what I wanted,' how does the contractor prove they met expectations without a contract?'

Obtain standard contracts from builder associations, realtor boards or architects. Kenyon estimates attorney contract fees range from a

few hundred dollars into the thousands, depending on detail and preparation If disputes boil over into

the courtroom, consider hiring expert witnesses. Engineers, architects, even other contractors can testify on substandard work or other issues. "As easy as it is to take

photos and video, you should take both on a regular basis to show progress and general project conditions," said Kenyon.

Don't expect to recover damages beyond the value of the job.

"Damages in this setting are the costs to correct the problem," said Kenyon. "You can get punitive damages in the rare instance when a builder or contractor was extraordinarily bad, such as ignoring building codes or work done in a dangerous manner.'

The days of deals sealed by a handshake are long

"Believe it or not, people still shake hands on projects but that's just not enough anymore," said Kenyon. "A contract really is in the best interests of both sides."

Understanding blueprints benefits homeowners, designers and the resulting home project

BY DAVID BRADLEY

The Associated Press

To many would-be homebuilders, construction documents — blueprints — are as close as they ever get to hieroglyphics.

Its a language only contractors could love.

But consumers had better learn the lingo, too, because what's lost in translation places their project — and their pocketbook — at risk. "I once heard a contractor

say even his skills could never save a project from poor design," said Larry Golden, a designer from Santa Cruz, Calif. "Thats where the homeowner needs to start, with a good set of understandable plans."

Room labels and dimensions are easy to identify. The all-important minutia

overlooked. To design pros like Golden, the worst thing the customer can say after a halfhearted glance at his work is "It looks OK to me."

Theres all manner of fine points begging to go undetected: wall or door positioning, material specifications or special requests the client asked for, but doesnt have the foggiest notion if the requests made it on

Theres not enough space here for a complete rundown of construction document terminology. Golden says thats his job when hes face-to-face with customers.

"I spend a lot of time talking about construction practices with clients so they know what theyre looking at on the drawings," said Golden. "I encourage them to read the boilerplate and

general notes. The customer needs to understand the entire undertaking so they can speak the same language as the tradespeople. They stand a better chance of a successful project."

Golden usually prepares more than one view of a room to help clients visualize the end product. He walks them through nonglamorous small points such as location of insulation,

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room dimensions, fixtures and wall studs. To him, a good designer is part artist, teacher and counselor.

Going the extra yard to create a depth of understanding has pluses for architects and

designers, too. Its easier to fire up a CAD (computer aided design) system to make instant changes than to rip out recently completed work that wasnt quite



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