

Snapdragons, asters, pansies brighten up fall

BY JOHN O'CONNELL
Copley News Service

When crisp autumn weather arrives, gardens can still blossom with color as heat-loving 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 fall."

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.

With 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. Bright-colored 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-leaved, succulent plants with flat-topped flower clusters of yellow, 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 leaves."



CNS Photo by Roni Galgano

Bright-colored pansies are particularly tough in cold weather, providing a welcome burst of color in the autumn and into winter.

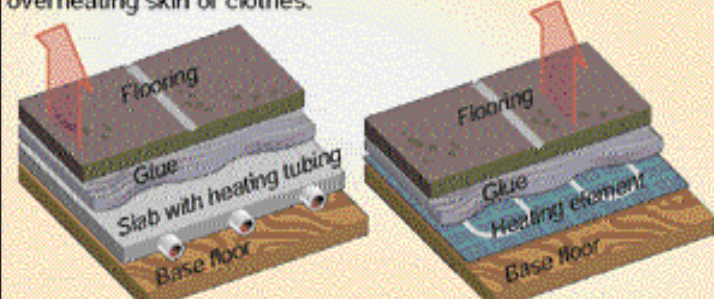
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