

EXTENDING THE SEASON

While some consider fall the end of flowers in the garden and simply a time for cleanup and bulb planting, it doesn't have to be that way. The autumn season can be a brilliant time in any garden, and you aren't limited to just mums and pansies, either.

The fall season can be approached in several different ways. You can easily switch out hot-loving annuals for cold-loving ones when cool weather arrives. Or you can start early by planning a garden with perennials that bloom in September and October. Plus, today's plant offerings include many species that double as spring and fall plants or summer and fall plants, as well as ornamental grasses that provide colors and textures throughout the year. Of course, you can also combine any or all of these techniques, using containers or garden beds.

Most of the flowers we mention here will tolerate a light frost; and if you experience hard frosts in the 20s, then you might consider covering some of your plants or moving containers indoors to extend the season even further. If you incorporate ornamental grasses into your plantings, you can enjoy their colors and textures even when the snow flies.

Annual color

Pansies, mums and asters rank as the most popular choices for fall plants. With their wide ranges of colors and a classic autumn look, you can't go wrong by planting these—in either containers or in your garden. However, breeding and marketing efforts in the last several years have introduced a number of plants that perform well in cooler weather. Don't be surprised to see dianthus, snapdragons, calibrachoa, osteospermum, salvia and others in the garden center this fall. Plus, ornamental cabbage and kale can add fall flavor as well. Most of your fall annuals will benefit from an application of all-purpose fertilizer every two weeks or so.

When: You've got a couple of options when it comes to plant-



ing times for annuals. Many of these cool-loving annuals, such as snapdragons, pansies and osteospermum also make great early-spring choices. So if you still have them in your garden, they may just need a little cutting back through the hot summer months before they revive for fall. You can also purchase them in the late summer or fall.

One great trick is to go in and remove the plants that are spent for the season and replace them with any of the fall plants we mention here. It'll spruce up your garden without requiring an overhaul.

Plant specifics: Look for pansies, violas, dianthus, snapdragons, primula, calibrachoa, osteospermum, salvia, sedum, heuchera, phlox hybrids and lysimachia. Other options include Iceland poppies, diascia, argyranthemum and carex (sometimes considered an ornamental grass).



Each issue, *Green Profit* organizes a ready-made class on livegood and hardgood topics in the form of a magazine page you can tear out, even giving it to customers who want questions answered, myths debunked and a reason to be in a garden environment, regardless of the season. You provide the customers and example products; we'll do the rest.

Pansies are actually a biennial, which means that if you plant them this fall, they should overwinter and bloom next spring as well. Make sure to give them full sun (i.e., at least six hours of sun per day) and well-drained soil.

Ornamental cabbage and kale will bring both color (in greens, whites, pinks, reds and purples) and texture to a garden. Ornamental cabbage looks much like the edible cabbage you'd find in a garden. Meanwhile, kale tends to be more unfolded, with fancy, ruffled leaves. Beware that if you plant cabbage or kale too early, the hot days may produce a leggy plant. Waiting till cool days and frosts to plant will give you a more compact plant and it'll also enhance the pink and red pigmentations, which develop after prolonged cool weather and frosts. As a bonus, planting after the first frost also means you won't have to deal with pesky cabbage loopers.

Ornamental grasses

Think about more than just blooms for fall. Ornamental grasses make great additions to both gardens and containers and can provide interest from spring through the winter months. For example, in the summer, purple fountain grass will produce cattail-like plumes which will last until frost. And then, its green foliage turns golden brown in the fall.

When: Depending on the zone where you garden, some ornamental grasses may be considered perennials while others should be treated as annuals. Depending on which variety you purchase, you can plant ornamental grasses in the spring, summer or fall. For grasses that will overwinter in your area, you can leave the stalks up for the winter months. Then, in late winter/early spring, before new growth appears, you should cut down the dead growth.

Plant specifics: The ornamental grass world is brimming with selections ranging from short, compact plants to 15-ft. high stalks. And the color choices are just as broad.

Feather grass (*Calamagrostis brachytricha*) usually has a cascading clump with foxtails and provides a visual focus for summer, fall and winter. Feather reed grass (*Calamagrostis x acutiflora*) flowers in June, but provides great golden foliage for fall. It also makes a good centerpiece for combination containers, with the variety Karl Foerster being quite popular. Fountain grasses (a.k.a. pennisetum) are another popular choice for grasses that have green foliage that turns golden in the fall.

Miscanthus varieties come in a range of colors and textures with heights of 4 to 15 ft., and many of them are perfect for the back

of a border. The variety *Miscanthus sinensis* Strictus has yellow zebra stripes with a reddish-brown plume.

If you have a shade garden, *Cimicifuga simplex* White Peace is a great ornamental grass for those lower-light spots. It has fragrant 2-in. spikes on tall, floating stems. Japanese forest grass (*Hakonechloa macra*) will do well in part shade.

Perennials

Perennials not only give you a wide range of choices for fall color, but they'll be there year after year to spice up your garden.

When: Look for perennials that bloom or provide interesting foliage in September, October and/or November, and remember that bloom time will vary even by variety. While it might be difficult to resist picking out blooming perennials during your shopping sprees in the spring and summer, try choosing some green plants, too, that'll bloom for you during the autumn. Of course, you may also be able to plant perennials later on in the season, but planting them in the spring or summer will allow them to get more established in the garden.

Plant specifics: There's a whole world of fall-flowering perennials to choose from, whether it's for sun, shade, containers, borders or a basic perennial bed. Depending on your region, many of the ornamental grasses we mentioned above may actually function as perennials for you.

Fall monkshood (*Aconitum carmichaelii*) makes a great companion to some of the taller ornamental grasses with its height of 5 to 6 ft. and its deep-violet flowers that somewhat resemble delphiniums. (However, you should take note that monkshood is considered poisonous if eaten.)

Other perennials to consider include, but certainly aren't limited to: asters; several fall-blooming species of gentian; anemone (a good option for shade gardens); sedum (the varieties Autumn Joy and Purple Emperor are popular); rudbeckia; Joe Pye weed (a.k.a. eupatorium); goldenrod (a.k.a. solidago), which can spread rapidly; and toad lily (a.k.a. trycirtis), which is another shade perennial.

With most plants (including biennial pansies), it's best not to try to overwinter them in containers if you're facing a cold winter. With less soil than a garden bed, plants often get dehydrated in containers during the winter months and they're also often exposed to a harder freeze. If you insist on trying it out, you might want to put a layer of mulch around the plants for extra protection. ♡



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