

Pansies & Violas & Their Care

Pansies and violas are one of the first flowers of spring and if taken care of correctly, will continue to bloom until the heat of the summer. You will find they will return as it cools in fall, performing through early winter. Follow these tips for success with these cold tolerant, tender perennials, Viola x wittrockiana.

Favorable Conditions

Both pansies and violas bloom best in sun to partial shade, requiring four or more hours of direct sunlight. They also prefer cool growing temperatures 40-70 degrees F. Morning sun (Eastern exposure) with some afternoon shade is an excellent growing site. However, they can tolerate warmer exposures and will bloom longer if planted in evenly moist, well-drained, nutrient rich soil. They make excellent container garden or bedding plants, and attract butterflies with their light fragrance.

Planting

When planting, mix 1 part Petitti Planting Mix with 1-2 parts existing soil or use Miracle Gro Moisture Control Potting Mix for container gardens. Add Plant-tone and Ironite or Osmocote to enrich the soil. These slow release fertilizers can be incorporated into the soil before planting or added to the top of the plant's root system after planting. It is best to fertilize pansies and violas in spring and again late summer as they come out of their dormancy for fall blooming. Plant your pansies and violas approximately 6-12" apart. Remember to keep them evenly moist.

Maintaining

Viola x wittrockiana is a hybrid species, therefore the large flowering pansy and the smaller flowering viola have the best of flowering traits. They are vigorous, extremely colorful, and are very easy to maintain. Other than watering and fertilizing, mentioned above, the large flower pansies do look best when they are deadheaded (removing the spent flowers and its stem) before they begin to form seeds. Pinching is fine, or you can use scissors/pruners to remove the faded flowers. Violas are too small to really deadhead, but like pansies they may require being cut back to a couple of inches when they become leggy, especially before they go dormant during the summer. In late fall, you may choose to let the plants produce seed that you can collect and sow in the spring or simply let drop to germinate and then bloom next year. Also as hybrids, they have excellent over-wintering abilities.

Preparing for winter

It is very important that you continue to water well before the ground freezes. After the ground freezes (around the first week in December in Northeast Ohio), lightly mulch, creating a "turtleneck" around the flower. Do not cover the plant entirely, for you can usually enjoy the blooms in to early winter. If you planted violas and pansies in container gardens they can stay out all winter or brought into a cold garage or shed and watered sparingly, approximately once a month.