

## Use Winter Annuals to Brighten Your Garden



Pansy

BARTOW -- Garden centers are full of cold season annuals including pansies, snapdragons and petunias. They can be used in many ways - in old flower beds, hanging baskets, planters and dish gardens. These plants like cold weather and can even withstand light freezes.

Before planting, remove all the older plantings from the soil. Add lots of organic matter, such as peat moss and composted manure, 2 to 3 inches thick. Also, add two pounds of a garden fertilizer such as 6-6-6 per every 100 square feet of soil. Try to find fertilizers that are low in phosphorous and contain slow-release nitrogen. Till the fertilizer and the organic matter into the soil to a depth of 6 inches. Be careful not to set the plants too deep. Moisten the soil when it becomes dry to the touch and fertilize monthly.

Snapdragons are one of my favorites. Small, medium and large cultivars are available to fit most gardening needs. They come in most colors except blue. Snapdragons should be grown in full-sun to lightly shaded areas. Make sure to stake taller varieties to prevent wind damage. They should be fertilized once a month with a good garden fertilizer. Remove old flower heads to encourage new blooms. Control caterpillars with the microbial insecticide Bt, and aphids with a spray of Ivory soap and water.

Annuals can be damaged by nematodes. These are small microscopic worms present in most Florida soils and can damage many plants, including annuals. It is best not to grow the same plant in the same place every year. The addition of compost each year will help suppress nematode injury to plants by encouraging the plants to be healthy and subsequently more tolerant to nematodes. High organic matter in soils also encourages the growth of predaceous nematodes - those nematodes that feed on plant parasitic nematodes. Soil solarization will help control nematodes and is about the only other option for the homeowner.

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## Images



Pansy



Petunia



Snapdragon