

Icicle Pansies

FOR SPRING...AND AUTUMN

The Pansy is a plant that most are familiar with as a harbinger of spring, alongside spring bulbs it is undoubtedly one of the most popular spring blooming plants. For many years professional horticulturists have known of a secret planting method of this spring bloomer; it is best planted in the autumn for very early spring flowering. Gardeners at the Niagara Parks have planted the Hydro Floral Clock every autumn with thousands of Pansies that, in late autumn and early spring, provide visitors to Niagara with a spectacular show.

Visitors to the Floral Clock may have assumed that one planting was in the autumn while another was planted in the spring. Little did they realize that the hardy pansy, if given sufficient snow cover, could hibernate through the winter to bloom again in early spring and was happy in the spring climate until the heat of summer exhausted it.

The pansy was a minor player on the plant stage until the marketing gurus and company called Fernlea Flowers based in Delhi, Ontario to put the lowly pansy on centre stage of the academy awards. Fernlea trademarked a group of colourful pansy's calling them Icicle Pansies, urging gardeners to plant them in the autumn to enjoy but also the same plants would make a colourful spring display. These stars appeared everywhere and were a big hit when you could buy them at the local grocery store in a six pack, with a convenient handle on the pack so plants could easily be toted home along with the groceries.



It really does not matter if you plant Icicle Pansies or ordinary Pansies, if you follow a few simple steps you are almost assured of success both in the autumn and spring. Pansies prefer a good garden soil, which is high in organic matter (you may need to add compost) and is well drained but retains some moisture. For best effect plant en masse, large groups of either single or mixed colours work best and from a design perspective it is effective if the groupings are repeated in several spots in the garden with some continuity in colour.



Select a site in the garden in either full sun or partial shade but that collects snow in winter. A good winter covering of snow is key to their survival and snow drifting onto planting areas is encouraged. Evergreen boughs such as spruce branches laid across planting just before the onset of snow can encourage drifting and provide some protection in between snowfalls. It is best not to plant where snow is piled from walkways or driveways, since Pansies are evergreen the piled snow may delay or even suffocate the Pansies in spring when they should be growing.

Pansies require little in the way of feeding and can get by on minimal water if the soil is rich. By early summer Pansies begin to decline and at this point it is best to remove them and replace with summer annuals. However, if planted in partial shade and given adequate moisture over the summer, plantings can occasionally make it through the summer heat. A grouping of Pansies planted in the gardens at Fanshawe College is now going into their second winter with us: they are the real Icicle Pansies.