

Bell County Master Gardeners
Tip of the Week
By Jann Dworsky
“Pansies, A Winter Delight”

Many gardeners love the tradition of planting what they saw as children in their parents' and grandparents' gardens; pansies are no exception. I have watched my mother plant pansies for years on 9th Street in Gatesville and both of my daughters are enjoying planting pansies. Appropriately enough, the name pansy is from the French word *pensie*, meaning thought or remembrance. Pansies are also associated with love. (theflowerexpert.com)

Pansies have a long history and are often found illustrated and referred to in works of literature. William Wordsworth has written about them; Georgia O'Keefe has painted exquisite white and black pansies, and the gardenfairy.com reminds us that William Shakespeare's character, Puck, used the juice of pansies to make “man or woman madly dote upon the next live creature that it sees.” Fortunately for the many pansy lovers, that is fiction. Look closely and you will see a “face” in the pansies, no matter their color or size.

The fact is, pansies and their leaves are edible and can be used on cold fruit or as a beautiful garnish on a salad. Several times a year I pick some beautiful purple and yellow pansies and float them in a shallow dish for a centerpiece at the table.

Pansy plants can be found in several sizes. The diameter of the large blooms is 3-4 inches, the medium 2-3 inches, and the multiflora 1-2 inches. Pansy plants only grow slightly larger over the winter, so plant as closely as possible for the maximum effect. The 1-2 inch multiflora or Johnny-jump-up is the ancestor of our pansies today. The gardenfairy.com states that in 1810 Mr. William Thompson crossed varieties of the *viola tricolor* with *viola lutea* and *viola altaica* to create our lovely pansies. Since then a huge variety of colors have been developed over the years, including “Antique shades”, and a “True Blue” as well as “sorbet” series.

Plant pansies in the ground as well as in several pots and in mass plantings. As you can see from the photograph, a strawberry jar works well also. The most important thing to remember about pansies is that deadheading, or pinching off the dead blooms and seedpods, keeps the new blooms coming all winter. I cover my pansies if the temperature drops significantly below freezing, but frost or a light freeze will not damage them. Fertilize pansies every 4 weeks with a nitrogen fertilizer and water well. Plant your pansies where they receive at least 6 hours of sun for maximum blooming.

Enjoy growing your pansies and passing the tradition down to others in your family.

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask.bcmga@gmail.com

Bell County Master Gardeners' spring plant sale
is Sat. March 24, 8:00, AM to 1PM.

Happy winter gardening and if you have further
questions email us at ask.bcmg@gmail.com.

