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Published on *Basmati* (<https://basmati.com>)

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Your Guide to Summer Flowers: Pansies



The pansy is a member of the genus *Viola* – it is closely related to the violet and of the species *Viola tricolor*. Its common name is derived from the French word “pensée” meaning “thought” because the petals of the flower can resemble a human face that nods downward in contemplation. The origin of the flower is not known but the first cultivation of the hybrid plant was done by English breeders who crossed the wild pansy with the yellow violet and the alpine violet. The modern day pansy first appeared in gardens in 1814 and by 1835 there were 400 named varieties. The flower came to America through catalogue orders in 1888 and its popularity in the United States continues. Pansies are annuals that can be found in a multitude of colors and are used as borders, grown in containers and make excellent ground cover. They are a hardy plant with delicate blooms that are edible. For centuries pansies have been used as a healing aid.

Pansies have a hollow stem growing to a height of four to twelve inches. The leaves grow alternately and have toothed edges on the lower portion of the plant. They have a five-petal bloom with two adjacent petals having two colors and three with solid colors that come in a large variety. They bloom from March to October and are considered a cold climate plant

found in northern Asia, Europe, and at the perimeter of forests in North America. They grow wild in meadows and on sunny banks of rivers, streams and creeks, as well as on the banks of moors and heaths. Pansies have a delicate, sweet scent that is strongest in the early morning and at dusk and the yellow or blue varieties have the strongest fragrance. These edible flowers have a minty flavor and are used to make syrup and flavor honey; they are also used as a garnish in punch and salads; bakers create dyes and candied cake decorations from pansies. Both the flower and leaves have a high vitamin A and vitamin C content.

Healing Properties of Pansies

For millennia, pansies have been used for healing a multitude of maladies. The blossoms, leaves, and stems have medicinal qualities and can be made into pansy tea, pansy nectar, pansy infusions, pansy balms and pansy tincture. The Chinese have used pansies for centuries to soften tumors preventing them from becoming malignant especially those forming in the breasts, lungs, and stomach. They are used to strengthen contractions and induce labor in pregnant women. They are also a pain reliever, used to reduce the effects of epilepsy, control the formation of mucus and as a diaphoretic, as well as a diuretic, expectorant, and laxative. As an infusion pansy heals skin eruptions, diarrhea, and urinary dysfunction. As a tea it reduces fevers, is a mild sedative, and is used as a blood purifier. It relieves the symptoms of asthma, arteriosclerosis, various skin disorders, heart palpitations, pleurisy and dry throat. The plant is used in treating coughs and lessens the incidence of bruising and ulcers. In dry form or as a salve made with honey it is used to heal wounds and other external applications. Because they have antibacterial and antifungal properties pansies are effective in preventing psoriasis, acne, eczema, itching, and cradle cap. However, it is advisable to use in moderation and stop using when the situation is healed.

How To Grow Pansies

Pansies are usually grown from seed but cuttings can also be used. They are a hearty, cold-climate plant that does well in full sun or light shade in rich loam, fertilized soil. It takes approximately ten to fourteen days for the seeds to germinate in a temperature range from sixty-five to seventy-five degrees Fahrenheit -- indoors to start, and then transplanted when seedlings are one to two inches tall. Seeds can be sown directly in the ground six inches apart. The plant will survive a light freeze and a little snow, making it an ideal year-round blooming plant for relatively mild climates. Fall planting should be done in July in a cold frame.

How To Care for Pansies

Pansies are a low maintenance plant that needs just a little attention. To be sure you have healthy plants throughout the summer be sure to water them regularly; they like moist soil. A general, all-purpose fertilizer will keep them growing and blossoming. It is important to remove faded or dead flowers to encourage new blossoms.

Pansies as Decoration

Pansies are low plants, making them a favorite border plant and edging between walkways and walls. They are early blooming plants that can be seeded over fall bulbs for continuous color in the spring. With the wide range of colors, pansies add to the creativity of the gardener affording a large palate from which to choose. They also do well with other flowers like the large, ruffled, double flowers in the Bolero Series, the range of blue to burgundy flowers of the Bingo Series and accented with the Princess series with a choice of blue, purple, and yellow

blooms.

Pansies are an old flower that has been bred to include many varieties. It is a sturdy flower with amazing healing qualities that have been used for centuries. Its color varieties make it an excellent addition to any garden and brings color from early spring to late fall and throughout the winter in mild climates. It is a non-toxic plant safe for children and animals and is a decorative garnish to salads and used to dye cake icings. This little flower is packed with a myriad of uses.

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