

**Janet B. Carson**  
**Extension Horticulture Specialist**  
**Arkansas Democrat-Gazette**  
**Fall and Winter Color 2017**

Our mild growing season has many of our gardens showing more color than usual at the end of the growing season. Summer annuals have reached new heights this year and are still growing strong. Continue to enjoy your summer color, but for those who don't have any color, or you want to begin planning for your cool season color, options are appearing at most nurseries and garden centers.

The staple cool season annual is still the pansy. Pansies have been the number one fall and winter bedding plant in the south for decades. There are a wide array of colors to choose from and flower size. Flowers may come with the traditional black blotch or "face" or they can be called clear—not having that dark blotch in the center. One of the newest series is the Cool Wave series of pansies, which have more of a sprawling habit. Don't plant pansies too soon in late summer or early fall, as they get leggy quickly if exposed to high temperatures. Do try to get them in the ground early enough in the fall to get a root system established before it gets too cold. They do like nutrition, so fertilize periodically even in the winter months. Depending on how much fluctuation in temperatures we get or how low they go can determine how well they survive.

A kissing cousin of pansies is violas. While the flower size is smaller, they tend to bloom prolifically from early fall through early summer, when the temperatures rise high enough to make them play out. They are more tolerant of fluctuations in temperatures, especially high temps, so they often perform better in the south than pansies. Again, a wide array of flower colors and some interesting new varieties. A new strap-petaled form called 'Bunny Ears' and a highly ruffled form with many colors in the Frou series.

Dianthus are touted as annuals, biennials or short-lived perennials, but they have done well in our gardens this year. Most survived the mild summer and are reblooming again now. If you don't have any growing in your garden, consider planting some. Flowers come in shades of pink, purple, red and white. There are single colors and multi-colored options. They bloom and rest off-and-on throughout the year but shine in the cool days of fall. They must have a well-drained soil if they are going to survive.

Snapdragons are another annual that has been surviving and blooming longer in the gardens. It blooms best in the cool days of fall and spring, but can give blooms in mild winter and even summer days. With spikes of color ranging from pink, yellow, red, white and orange, there are dwarf and standard varieties.

While all of the above should survive all winter in the garden, there are a few flowers that are often called "shoulder blooms" giving short but intense color in the fall until it gets really cold when they die, or in the spring until it gets really hot and they play out. These can be the added boost your garden needs to give some great color. Osteospermum, calendula, nemesia, and diascia are some examples.

Osteospermum, commonly called Cape Daisy or Daisy Bush, is a beautiful flowering annual. While breeders are hard at work trying to build in heat tolerance, they

still tend to fare better fall and spring in Arkansas. There are many colors available and some new flowered forms with petals like spoons are available.

Calendula is a great plant for fall color. Commonly called pot marigold it comes in vibrant shades of orange, yellow and a new 'Flashback' series with some interesting color mixes. They make a good cut flower and are also considered an herb.

Nemesia and diascia are native to South Africa and are in the snapdragon family. They thrive in cool temperatures. Nemesia is a bit more upright than diascia but has a broader range of colors. Diascia is commonly called twin-spur is a great low spreading annual with larger flowers than Nemesia. It comes in white, pink and orange and gives you a boost of color in the fall and spring. Both will tolerate light freezes before succumbing to a hard freeze.

While we often think of flowers for annual color, there are also a number of foliage plants for fall and winter interest. There are numerous varieties of flowering kale and cabbage, and dusty miller with its dusty white foliage can make the colors in your flowers stand out even more.

Ever heard the saying "they look almost good enough to eat", well these plants are edible. Swiss chard comes in a wide array of foliage and stem colors, and there are a multitude of showy kale varieties from Red bor kale, dinosaur kale (Toscano), Winterbor and Red Russian. If you like mustard greens plant the giant purple mustard and Bull's Blood beets. Try orange or purple cauliflower, purple and red cabbage and a grouping of different colored lettuce leaves. Consider adding parley and cilantro into your fall planting mix for some vibrant green colors. All of these plants are as colorful as they are edible. Sort of like having your cake and eating it too!

Every garden needs color in every season. As you begin to add fall and winter color, look for something other than the same thing you did last year. You may find a new favorite.