

## **Pansies**

Pansies and Violas are members of the Viola family along with violets and Johnny-Jump-Ups. They love cool weather and bright, full sun. That makes them good candidates for spring and fall color in Nebraska gardens. Both grow and bloom best with cool temperatures below 75° F, however, they cannot tolerate Nebraska's hot, dry summer conditions and begin fading out and dying when temperatures get too warm.

Pansies, *Viola x wittrockiana*, and Violas are easy to grow, if given full sun and cool growing temperatures. They prefer moist soil and will benefit from a layer of organic mulch, such as wood or bark chips, shredded bark, ground corn cobs or cocoa bean hulls, to retain moisture and exclude heat from the planting bed. Less watering is needed in the cooler temperatures of fall, because water evaporates more slowly from the soil and from the plants leaves, but do water as needed to prevent plants from wilting or developing scorching of the leaf edges. However, do not overwater pansies either. Continually wet soil can lead to root and crown rots. Fertilize plants sparingly to prevent the development lush growth with low cold temperature tolerance.

Pansy cultivars are available with a variety of flower sizes ranging from large to small. Large flowers are showy, but keep in mind that they are also more easily damaged by wind and rain. Plants with a profusion of small flowers can be just as showy.

Pinch blooms off as they begin to fade. This prevents the plant from producing seed, instead causing it to produce more flowers. It also encourages the development of short, bushy plants. Tall, lanky plants have been grown in too much shade. Relocate the plants to a sunnier location, and cut them back by one third to stimulate new growth and flowers.

“Skippy XL Plum-Gold” Viola, *V. cornuta*, is a 2008 All-America selection and has uniquely designed flowers with plum shades surrounding the golden center “faces”. The blooms are small, about 1-1/2 inches, but the number of flowers produced more than makes up for the size.

The petite plants growing 6 to 8 inches tall and wide are highly recommended for combination planters. Gardeners can rely on “Skippy XL Plum-Gold” to provide abundant spring blooms whether growing in containers, window boxes, or annual or perennial gardens. In Nebraska plants can be expected to begin blooming in spring up to the hottest parts of summer.