

## **Summer annuals offer fall color, too.**

Back to school signals the time to pluck the summer annuals from our pots to make room for mums, pansies, and ornamental cabbage and kale. But wait. Some of those annuals that bloomed all summer will continue well into fall.

Take geraniums for instance. These quintessential annuals of summer have filled porch pots and garden beds for decades upon decades. As long as they have been provided the conditions they prefer – lots of sunshine and watering whenever their well-drained soil dries, balanced fertilizer every few weeks, and deadheading to keep the plant bushy and to encourage continual blooming, geraniums are happy to perform in fall plantings, too.

Due to their trailing habit, ivy geraniums are often planted in hanging baskets. Red-flowered varieties like Calliope Dark Red are as suitable in displays with pumpkins and gourds as they were with pots of coleus and sweet potato vine.

Some zonal types with pretty patterned foliage are perfectly painted for fall. Vancouver boasts reddish-burgundy pointed leaves margined in gold or lime green; Exotica Tricolor sports more rounded foliage, showing off concentric circles of bleeding color – creamy yellow at the margin, then dark gray-green, then burgundy, and finally another shot of dark gray-green in the center.

Petunias will also flower into fall. One of the most popular bedding plants, they bloom so generously they require consistent fertilizer to keep them looking their best all summer and to prepare them for an additional season of service. Deadheading is a must on all but the newest cultivars, and a little tough love toward the end of summer to get them into autumnal game shape.

When the stems get leggy and grow fewer leaves, cut them back by half. Petunias will quickly produce a flush of new foliage and flowers ready to carry the color in fall containers with ornamental kale and garden mums.

Marigolds bloom in colors perfect for the fall palette – creamy white, golden yellow, and orange. African marigolds are the tallest types, growing up to 3 feet; French marigolds are considerably shorter. They are both eager to perform in both hot summer sunshine and autumn's cooler weather with little attention. They actually prefer to be left alone, letting the soil dry out between watering and forgoing frequent fertilizer applications.

Just as kids get haircuts in preparation for the new school year, marigolds may need their stems pruned back by a third to force a flush of fall blooms.

As pretty as dahlias are in summer, I think they are even more beautiful in fall. Available in a rainbow of colors and range of flower styles and sizes, there are miniatures, giants as tall as 5 feet, and all sizes in between. If given their favored growing conditions – rich, well-drained soil in full sun and consistent moisture, monthly applications of flower-boosting fertilizer and removal of spent flowers, dahlias bloom and bloom and bloom until frost.

No extra pruning or primping is needed to get them ready for fall. I think their colors become even richer when the path of the sun lowers in the sky. They positively glow in fall containers. Dahilia 'Bishop of Llandaff' is gorgeous partnered with a bright yellow mum, ornamental peppers, and red-flowering million bells.

These are just a few of the annuals that are suitable to remain in fall containers. Keep salvias and zinnias deadheaded all summer, prune them back if needed, and the hummingbirds and butterflies will thank you for letting them stay in containers until frost claims them.

Mums and pansies are great and I plan to purchase plenty, but before sentencing all summer annuals to the compost bin, considering granting some a fall pardon.

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