

Question: Are pansies annual or perennial plants?

Answer: The pansy is a cultivated violet of the genus *Viola* in the family *Violaceae*. The history of the pansy is linked forever to the viola, its ancestor.

The garden pansy (*Viola x wittrockiana*) is a hybrid, one of whose parents is *V. tricolor* which is a weed of European grain fields, the other parents being *V. lutea* and *V. altaica*.

The center of origin for violas was continental Europe. *Violas* were familiar to people living in Greece in the 4th century B.C. The hardy but delicate viola was cultivated by the Greeks for herbal medicinal use and much later inspired William Shakespeare to write of romance.

Pansies symbolize “thinking” or “thoughts.” The word “pansy” itself comes from French “pensée”, meaning “thought.” In Victorian times, the pansy was second only to the rose, conveying loving thoughts in the language of flowers.

The pansy may be treated as either an annual or a perennial. If you allow your pansy plants to remain in your garden and rest during the hottest months, they will probably begin blooming again in the fall. Shearing the plants back when they start to set seed will encourage new growth.

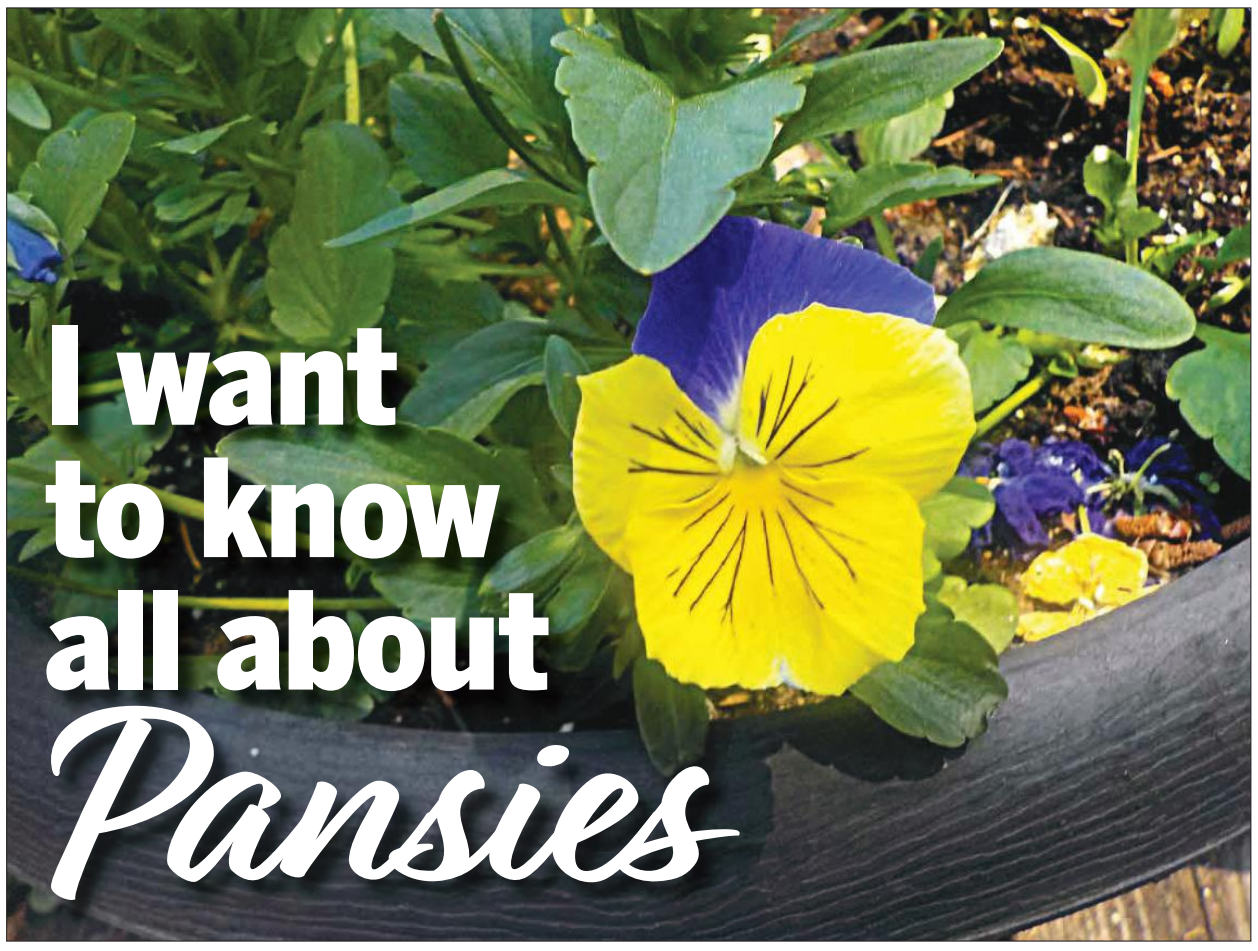
Deadheading (cutting dead flowers off a healthy plant) will encourage more blooms. If properly planted and well cared for, pansies can last for three years or more.

Pansies may be started from seed or purchased as seedlings from the local garden center. If buying nursery plants, choose pansies that are bushy, and have plenty of buds. Avoid plants full of open blooms, because they will be stressed to near exhaustion from working so hard in a tiny pot.

Plant your pansies in moist, humus-rich, well-drained soil. Proper preparation of the soil goes a long way to producing healthy flowers. Work in organic material such as compost. Pansies prefer acidic soil, so do not add lime unless indicated by a soil test.

You can use a general, all-purpose fertilizer around your pansies to help them grow. Be wary of using a nitrogen-heavy fertilizer, though, as this can result in more foliage instead of flowers.

Pansies will bloom best in full sun to partial shade. They



I want to know all about Pansies

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHRIS RUSCH

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Chris Rusch
Ask a Master Gardener

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Pansies are great for containers. Early in the spring or in the fall, a south-facing patio might be the perfect spot. During the summer, move pansies to the east side of your home for morning sun and afternoon shade.

There are over 500 varieties of pansies to choose from. The pansy has one of the widest color ranges of any garden flower. Included are red, purple, blue, bronze, pink, black, yellow, white, lavender, orange, apricot and mahogany. The flowers may be of a single

color or have two or three colors with a face. Certain types have petals with crinkled fluffy edges, others do not.

Flower size may range from 1-3 inches in diameter depending on the culture. Pansies are divided into series. Here are some to check out:

■ **Bolero Series:** Large, ruffled, semi-double flowers; does well in both spring and fall.

■ **Cool Wave Series:** Fast-growing with vigorous bloom; plants have a spreading habit, like Cool Wave petunias. Good “spillers” for containers and hanging baskets.

■ **Freefall Series:** Day-neutral, trailing plants; great for containers.

■ **Joker Series:** Very pronounced faces; bicolored in complementary colors.

■ **Princess Series:** Compact growth habit and dainty flowers; monochromatic tones from cream to deep purple, with yellow centers.

■ **Crystal Bowl series:** All are clear colors without a face. There are eleven colors in this series. The compact plants do not sprawl in the garden.

■ **Maxim series:** The fourteen Maxim colors have faced flowers that bloom prolifically



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on compact plants. All Maxims are heat and cold tolerant.

Another quality of interest is fragrance. Pansies have a delicate scent which is most evident during the early morning and at dusk. The yellow and blue pansies are the most fragrant. The flowers are often used in potpourri.

Pansy flowers make delightful decorations for cakes, deserts and salads. They have a mild minty flavor and make for a lovely edible flourish.

All things considered, pansies are adaptable, charming plants. At any time of the year, a pansy will be blooming

prolifically outdoors someplace in our region. Pansies are certainly a “plant for all seasons.” Good for containers, borders, and ground cover, they are a go-to flower for reliable color almost year-round.

Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.