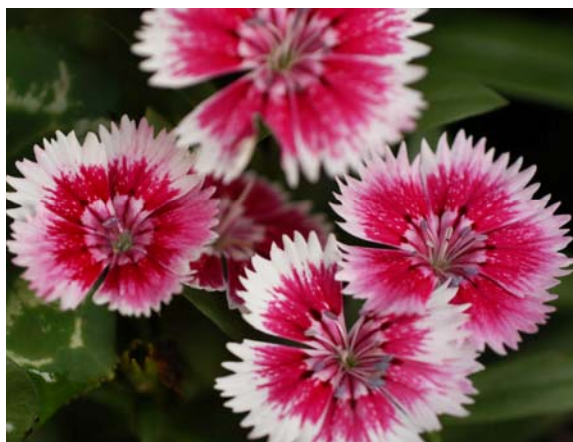


Dianthus

A favorite cool-season annual bedding plant of mine is the dianthus. This slender stemmed, narrow-leafed vibrant plant forms mats of color that resemble a carpet, but without some of the typical problems associated with pansies. With several new varieties, these annuals are ready to compete with pansies in the battle for cool season color. Dianthus will take on some shade and still bloom, however they do like the sun-- at least four-five hours' worth. As an added benefit, some species have still retained fragrance, while others have lost their 'smell' in the genetic process.

The fringed bloom flower petals give an informal look to the plant which pairs very well with pansies or tall snapdragons, because dianthus only reaches a height of about 1.5 feet. Use in borders, winter containers, or in mixed bed combinations. Occasionally some dianthus will make it through spring and into early summer, depending on location.



Successful dianthus beds should have fast draining topsoil that is fertile, neutral to slightly alkaline (Ph 6.7). Dianthus will tolerate dry periods, typical of a Texas winter, but flowering is best achieved with a slightly moist soil. Most difficulties with dianthus are typical of cool-season annuals in general—crown rot in poorly draining, wet soil. Additionally, if they are planted in continually wet soil, various fungal problems may arise. Watch for slugs that seem to also like their tender foliage. Raised beds for bedding plants work best in most all situations.

Plant dianthus at the same approximate depth as the grow pot. Avoid planting too deep as to bury any stem structure because they need air circulation. Avoid mulching around the crown of the plant with a course, thick hardwood mulch. Instead, consider using loose type mulch, such as cypress or bark. Deadheading the spent blooms will ensure a longer flowering period. Also feed them lightly with a complete (preferably liquid) fertilizer approximately every six weeks for consistent blooms.

Dianthus propagation can be started from seeds, division, or cuttings. Several varieties of note; I have had very good success with Telstar white, others include Telstar scarlet, and Floral Lace: mix, rose, violet. (All shown).

Interesting tidbits:

- The genus name, Dianthus was assigned by Linnaeus means 'divine flower'
- Various species have hybridized so much that specific species are hard to pinpoint. Many are just called cultivars or hybrids among the species.