

Tennessee's Expert Growers Say Think Outside the Flower Box for Fall

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Tennesseans tend to pursue two basic flowering plants in the fall: chrysanthemums, and, for even cooler weather, pansies. Mums and pansies are great staples in Tennessee to add to fall color, but there are several other types of flowering plants that do very well for fall in Tennessee. It just makes sense to go to the experts to get garden and landscape ideas, and in Tennessee great nurseries and garden centers grow like, well, weeds. All across the state, these plant fanatics are more than happy to help you learn about flora that helps your garden or lawn remain colorful long after summer flowers have faded.



Most of these growers have their plant selections growing on site, so you don't have to worry about plants being stressed from getting transported in hot trucks with little water for an undetermined length of time. Plus, you have the chance to get planting and care information firsthand from the person who grew the plants, something you can't receive from most of the larger "box" stores. When you visit these prolific producers, remember to take a notepad and pencil, because it'll be hard to remember all their recommendations.

"We carry several different varieties of fall bloomers including Salvia and Cuphea," offers Rita Randolph of Randolph's Greenhouse in Jackson. Randolph's is a retail garden center that specializes in custom container gardens. "We use different varieties of perennial bloomers in our containers and compliment them with colorful, earth-tone foliage such as Lysmachia, Creeping Jenny, Spilanthes 'Toothache Plant', and most of the 'fall magic' stuff. The best thing about most of these is that they can be perennialized in the garden when we want to change themes."

Some other colorful fall plants recommended by Randolph include Heuchera, also known as coral-bells, which are known for their vibrant fall foliage, pink Anemone that have very showy blooms to attract butterflies, and hardy Ageratum, a native Tennessee plant with multiple misty blue flowers. "Most of our perennials, including black-eyed Susan and purple coneflower, will bloom right up until frost," says Tim Hitchcock of Daylily Nursery in Rock Island. "Some of our daylilies will continue blooming as well."

Pansies and their smaller counterpart, violas, also famous for fall and winter bloom color, can be grouped with ornamental cabbage and kale, also popular for their colorful cold weather foliage, to make a bright late fall combination. A good cold tolerant cabbage is "Ruby Perfection," but cold-loving lettuces like arugula and kales like "Redbore" and "Red Russian" are also sure bets. Lorraine Sutton of M & L Greenhouse in Shelbyville sell mums, pansies, cabbage and kale and, for those who'd love to have a beautiful view without all the sweat equity, Sutton has a full service garden center and landscaping service. The Suttons remind customers that spring flowers like tulips, daffodils and hyacinths come in bulb form and need to be planted in the fall, generally 4-6 weeks before first frost.

"Parsley is another plant that mixes well with pansies this time of year," says Jean Anthony of Anthony's Greenhouse and Herb Farm in Brighton. "When everything else is turning brown, the parsley stays a fantastic shade of dark green."

"This is our best mum crop in several years," says Vera Ann Myers, of Myers Greenhouse in Bulls Gap. A member of the Northeast Tennessee Specialty Growers, her family also has a corn maze and pumpkin patch this time of year. Because her customers like to come straight to the farm to pick up a little outdoor autumn day fun along with their homegrown mums, "We tend to stay very busy in the fall." The Northeast Tennessee Specialty Growers is an association made up of local family-owned nurseries and greenhouses. The group works together to offer East Tennessee a diverse selection of healthy plants as well as the finest personalized services.

"We always keep a nice selection of mums, pansies, ornamental cabbage and kale, as well as ornamental grasses for this time of year," says Ann Gaut of Ann's Greene Haus in Tusculum. Another member of the Northeast Tennessee Specialty Growers, Gaut has a full service retail garden center. "We also carry the Japanese Beautyberry that produces white berries that the birds love."

For a list of local flower growers statewide, including the Northeast Tennessee Specialty Growers or more information on fall plants visit www.picktnproducts.org and click on Nursery Products, or contact TDA Market Development at 615-837-5160.

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