

Pansy

History

The *Viola x wittrockiana*, commonly known as the viola or pansy, is a member of the *Violaceae* family. Roman mythology has it that Jupiter, who was the chief god, created pansy's sweet blossoms as food for his mistress, Io. More realistically, however, many species originate in central Europe and Asia, and several species originate in North America. Throughout history, this delightful family of herbs has brought smiles and the promise of relief from complaints as diverse as depression, excessive thirst, and rheumatism. Pansies are definitely flowers that cheer the heart and calm the soul.

Of the hundreds of violas that exist, only a few are well known to us. The common sweet violet (*V. odorata*), a woodland perennial, was favoured by the ancient Athenians as a cure for hangovers, was employed as a sweetener by monks in the Middle Ages, and served as the main ingredient in England's best-selling toilet water up until World War I.

The perennial horned violet (*V. cornuta*), a Swiss native, became a popular ground cover in England after its introduction in 1776 because of its fragrance. The pale-blue, white, or mauve blossoms bear delicate spurs, and the plants flourish from spring to fall.

Care

Pansies need high levels of light, making them plants that enjoy full sun. A light, free-

draining medium is suggested for pansies. It should be somewhat acidic, with a pH of about 5.5 to 5.8. As a caution, refrain from a pH higher than 6.5 because boron and iron deficiencies will occur.

Pansies, furthermore, should be allowed to dry out between watering but never allowed to wilt. Be extremely careful not to over water your pansies. Over watering causes roots to rot and encourages nutrient imbalances.

Magnesium deficiency can be a problem with this genus and can be resolved by applying a general-purpose fertilizer containing trace elements.

Propagation is by seeds.

Pests and Diseases

Pansies tend to become stressed and more susceptible to pests and diseases during periods of intense heat. They can attract spider mites, aphids, and thrips during stress periods.

In terms of disease, pansies can contract black root rot, a disease that reduces the overall vigour of the plant, yellows the lower foliage, and produces black lesions on the roots. To guard against such problems, keep your plant from becoming too hot and from drying out, being careful not to over water and to keep the soil at a pH between 5.5 and 5.8.

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