



# NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

## **Pentas – A Pretty Starburst Popper!!** (April 17, 2021)

*by Penye Cushing, UCCE Master Gardener*

Imagine planting a few plants in early spring and watching them bloom until first frost in blazing colors of red, purple, white, blue or pink. Each 'ball' of blooms is comprised of tiny star shaped flowers on a plant that will slowly reach 18-36 inches tall by 15 inches wide. The name pentas comes from the Greek word meaning a 'series of five-pointed star shapes.' The plant is also known as the Egyptian star for the same reason.

This hard worker has hairy green leaves supporting each vibrant starburst. Coming originally from warm tropical areas they adore our zones 9-11 weather!! How great is that?

All summer long you will observe hummingbirds and butterflies partaking of the prolific sweet nectar. They continuously bloom and although they are considered an annual, in very warm years pentas will bloom or stay alive all year. Pentas is deer 'resistant,' and total temptation to bees, butterflies and thirsty hummingbirds.

Plant them in a sunny location receiving 6-8 hours of full sun daily. Though they prefer well-drained loamy soil they will grow in almost any soil type. However, they dry out quickly so give them extra water during our notorious hot summers.

These plants are tender to cold so please do not plant until all danger of frost has passed. They are a lovely addition to borders and splendid with beds for their unsurpassed colors. Can't you imagine how beautiful they will be in a butterfly garden or even naturalized within a cottage garden? I've heard you can even grow them indoors if given enough sun light!



Once you have decided your color and placement, you'll want to pinch branches if they grow taller than rest of the plant. Otherwise, they grow willy-nilly and not appear at their best. When you pinch do so at the top of a bud a few inches below the tips of most of the other branches. Now you can make starts with the cuttings, root them using a hormone and add them to your garden when they are rooted in a couple weeks. As the new babies are growing take a moment to pinch off the stem ends to encourage a more compact plant and maximum blooms.



Mulch around each plant, but not too close to stems to keep weeds away and conserve moisture. When planting/transplanting, keep the babies carefully moist so they don't go into the dry ground with dry roots. Fertilize in-ground plants monthly to help your pentas grow and flower their best. Container plants need a few drops of a liquid fertilizer once a week.

Now is a good time to remind yourself of the old 'poke your finger in the ground moisture reader.' If the ground is too moist, the roots cannot breathe, and the plant will drown. If ground is too dry, the plant cannot take up the moisture it needs. If your plant has brown leaf edges, downward or sagging leaves, an overall yellow leaf color and a cessation of flower production, then you are probably looking at a plant that is over-watered. Your finger poke in the soil around the base of the pentas reveals soil moisture. A wet or cool, spongy soil suggests over-watering.

Pentas are not native (they come from Africa and Arabia), and are not considered invasive, since the cultivated versions sold here rarely re-seed. They seem to be healthy and usually without disease. Their main pest problem is spider mites.

Last July, I wished I had planted a lovely patriotic bed of red, white and blue pentas. It would have been perfect all summer long and into fall. This year, I plan to remedy that!

I am really glad I discovered this cheerful hard-blooming plant.