

## Timing is Everything

by Julie Silva

Are you seeing the holiday items hitting the stores? As they say, timing is everything. Preparing your yard for holiday color is all about timing, too. The weather and the seasons will dictate your planting schedule. Plant too early, the summer heat will end your holiday cheer. Plant too late in the cold ground, it will be spring before you see blooms. Now is the time for holiday colors to start in the garden.

As always, there is one more issue beyond the timing: what to plant? There are the steadfast choices, poinsettias in pots, cyclamen, snap dragons, and pansies; all in their best holiday garb. How about some new choices?

Anything green becomes an immediate backdrop for holiday decorations. The fragrance and needles of rosemary make it a leader in the shaped plant category. Boxwood runs a strong second. Both may be purchased already in a cone shape just waiting for decorations. Outdoors is their preference, but you may bring them in for short durations in your warm home. The European Lawson Cypress (*Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* Ellwoodii) is a soft, colorful upright small tree that is perfect for containers. Lawson Cypress comes in various shades of green with the lime green being a favorite.

Another fragrant plant with fruit that resembles Christmas ornaments is citrus. Citrus will be coming on with fruit right at the holidays. A perfect choice is the Meyer lemon. Meyer lemons will be easy to maintain in a pot and are loaded with fruit. A small string of lights will keep the lemon joyfully warm outdoors and filled with holiday spirit. After all the holidays are over these plants, with the exception of the citrus, may be planted in your yard after following the planting instructions.

Filling in around all these green larger plants is a large list of smaller, colorful holiday plants. Layering colors and textures will make your porch or yard have Christmas bright colors during the day. Many fall and winter plants are available today in small sizes to grow and fill in quickly. A medium-sized annual for the layer next to a large perennial could be ornamental cabbage, kale, or even lettuce. Loose leaf lettuce comes in a large variety of colors including a deep, dark red. Ornamental cabbage comes in a silver color that would play against many holiday colors. The next layer should be shorter using pansies, primrose, dianthus, or violas. By planting in blocks the color will be strong and eye catching. Another red annual is Swiss chard, it is both ornamental and edible. The red-stemmed variety is tall and very bright with large green leaves. You may find the red-stemmed variety packaged with the bright yellow and light green varieties combined. Kale has dark green, textured leaves that could play against many colors. Textures are often as important as color. Think about a block of red onions, upright and thin reeds pointing upwards. Surrounded by pure red pansies the combination would be traffic

stopping as people would try to figure out what plant is in your yard. By next spring you would have a double impact as you sliced those onions for your favorite turkey sandwich.

Now is the time to use your imagination to create a daytime color to match the nighttime light show. Holiday joy starts now in the garden. Happy holidays!

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