Pansies or Violas

Soon you'll be faced with a decision. You'll have to rip out your faded summer and fall bedding plants, but what will you replace them with? Pansies and Violas are a winter staple in Louisiana. Surely, you've heard of them both, but what are the differences?

First let's start with the similarities. In our climate, both a pansy and a viola are considered cool season annuals. They come in a wide variety of colors. They will grow and grow all winter long. Then they will bloom and bloom – until it gets too hot – and then they will die (usually sometime around or after Easter). Although in some zones they are perennial, in Louisiana, they will need to be replaced.

Now, differences. A pansies' flowers are usually a lot larger than violas. However, a viola will have MORE flowers per plant. Even though a viola's flowers might be smaller, I think they're cute! They are not any less showy than a pansy. A viola is sometimes referred to a "Johnny Jump Up" – maybe that's another reason why I like them so much.

Just like most bedding plants, they will perform best when pushed with a water-soluble fertilizer that is high in phosphorous. Add some slow-release granular fertilizer into the flower bed before you plant, and you'll be totally set for success.

I haven't said it in a while, but something I used to preach in this gardening tip is – "It is better to plant a 50-cent plant into a five-dollar bag of potting soil than a five-dollar plant into a 50-cent bag of potting soil. Don't forget to assess the soil in your flower bed prior to planting and add some fresh soil if necessary.

You really can't go wrong with either a pansy or a viola. Pansies are bigger, violas are smaller. But both will bloom all winter long and come in a wide variety of colors. I like to plant shades of blue and white to simulate a wintery and snowy feel! Happy Planting!

Written by John MacMillan