

Pushing the Envelope –

Early Spring Varieties

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Early spring is a hard time for gardeners because the days have gotten warmer and the inactivity of winter is pushing you to get something planted out in the garden. The call to get planting before the threat of frost has passed is hard to ignore. There are some plants that, if properly hardened off, will take several frosts with little or no damage and are perfect for early plantings. You should have these plants ready for early season sales to capitalize on the gardeners need to be planting something, anything at all.

Most gardeners are already aware that Pansies and Snapdragons are pretty cold tolerant and can

be planted early in the spring. However, with the introductions from recent years, there are new plants that would also be good for planting early in the spring. Ideas for early spring flowers include 'Butterfly' and 'Vanilla Butterfly' *Argyranthemum*. *Osteospermum* are also good early season plants. *Symphony Osteospermum* which comes in colors ranging from bright yellow and orange to soft peach and white are not only the most heat tolerant *Osteospermum* available they are also quite tolerant to cool spring temperatures. If you are looking for an *Osteospermum* with more "spring-like" colors try the new *Soprano™* series which has three varieties: 'Soprano™ Light Purple', 'Soprano™ Purple', and 'Soprano™ White'. This series is compact and well branched making it perfect for 4-inch pot production.

Nemesia and *Diascia* both belong to the same family as the common Snapdragon. Both of these plants, despite appearing to be quite delicate with small, profuse flowers and dainty foliage, are tough and will take inclement weather with ease. Colors are mostly in the pastel range from lavender and pink through coral and apricot. Some varieties to look for include 'Blue Bird', 'Blue Lagoon', *Safari™*, and *Sunsatia™* *Nemesia* and *Flying Colors™* *Diascia*.

Other plants that are good for early spring planting include *Dianthus* (Carnation), *Heuchera* (Coral Bells), and *Bracteantha* (Strawflower). *Dianthus* comes in many forms

from the compact bedding types to tall cut flower types. *Heuchera* are grown mostly for their fantastic foliage. Some newer varieties to try include *Amber Waves* (amber-gold foliage), *Amethyst Mist* (purple foliage overlaid with silver), and *Green Spice* (silver leaves with purple veins). If you are looking for something with a brighter, more summery color try *Sundaze™* *Strawflowers*, which come in bright yellows, oranges, and pinks

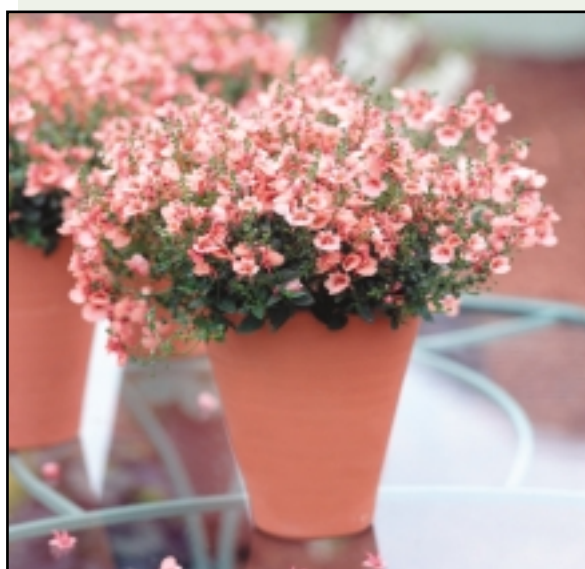
If consumers just can't wait for the threat of frost to pass, using a few of these varieties will satisfy their craving to plant while providing beauty that will last well into summer and beyond.



Osteospermum 'Soprano™ Light Purple'



Nemesia 'Sunsatia™ Peach'



Diascia 'Flying Colors™ Apricot'



Nemesia 'Safari™ Plum'



Heuchera 'Amethyst Myst'

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550 W. State St., Suite D • Sycamore, IL 60178 • (877) 865-5818 • E-mail: marshall@provenwinners.com