

Winter seasonals drive away monotony

As many plants become leafless and cease to show up in the cold months, the winter seasonals come to our rescue with their spectacular display in any garden setting, says **N. CHANDRAMOHAN REDDY**

POPULAR WINTER SEASONALS

Antirrhinum, Aster, Calendula, Chrysanthemum, Cosmos, Dahlia, Daisy, Dianthus, Gerbera, Hollyhock, Marigold, Nasturtium, Pansy, Petunia, Salvia, Sunflower

Growing tips

- Know the right species of seasonal flowers for your climate, soil and light availability for good growth and profuse blooms.
- Before you select the flower type, make sure that you know the basics of its gardening.
- Prefer the flowers which are less prone to pests and diseases.
- Design the size and pattern of the flower bed before you plant them and prepare the bed accordingly.
- Immediately after procuring the seedlings, keep them in a light shaded location for proper settlement and also to promote vegetative growth prior to bloom.
- In places of poor drainage, it is advisable to have raised beds rather than sunken ones.
- Prepare the bed preferably with herbicide treatment to avoid weeds after planting.
- Avoid the flower beds near the tree trunks as the lateral roots of those trees will suck the nutrients and moisture.
- If the plants are to be maintained in pots or hanging baskets throughout the season, the right size of the pot and right soil mix to be used to have good display.
- While planting, spacing should be maintained for each species in such a way that after full growth the plants shall neither be cramped up nor be too distant. Wider spacing will cause weed problem. One to one-and-a-half feet espacement is ideal for seasonal flowering plants.
- Always plant during the vegetative phase of the plant's life rather than blooming stage.
- Over-watering and poor drainage will result in less blooms and root rot.
- Plants shall be kept moist – but not wet and the potted ones could dry out quickly unless they are watered frequently.
- Misting the plants will help keep them healthy by adding humidity and deterring insects.
- Periodical feeding with the right fertilizer or manure will improve the colour, size and number of flower heads.
- Do not over fertilize as too rich a diet stimulates lush foliage at the expense of flowers.
- Most of the winter seasonals require bright sunlight during major part of the day.
- Keep the plants away from air conditioning and heater vents and draughty areas.
- If the potted plants receive light only from one side by dint of their placement (such as on a windowsill), turn them regularly for uniform growth.
- In most of the species if spent blooms are pruned away, the plants will continue to bloom for longer periods.
- Pinching of the lean and lanky plants will help in growth of lateral shoots.
- Frequent hoeing between the plants will improve the root aeration and prevent weed emergence.



VISUAL TREAT: It is very easy to raise most of the winter seasonal flowering plants through seeds. -PHOTOS: N. CHANDRAMOHAN REDDY.



GREEN MATTERS

Annuals or perennials based on their life cycle. Annual flowers are those that complete their lifecycle – growing and blooming, in only one growing season while perennial flowering plants grow and bloom for two (also called biennials) or more years before they die. Annuals, otherwise known as seasonals, must be replanted each year, which entails substantial gardening operations.

Most of the seasonal flower plants can either be raised in

garden beds or in pots of appropriate size. Manure rich soil media with good drainage is needed in either case. Visible and prime locations are to be selected for the flower beds or for placing the flower pots.

While selecting the species, one must make sure that each bed stands out with one single colour to have mass impact. However, flowers like Petunias and Dianthus may look pleasing when different hues are mixed in the same bed. Nowadays many dwarf hybrids of various species are available in the market, which

produce large flowers with bright colours to form a visual treat. Winter seasonals are susceptible to aphids, beetles, mites, mealy bugs, scale insects, nematodes, thrips, termites, caterpillars, leaf miners and fungal diseases. Preventive as well as post-attack pest management measures will help in reducing these problems. The affected portion or plant shall be removed to avoid the spread of the disease. It is very easy to raise most of the winter seasonal flowering plants through seeds. Alternatively readymade 'plug plants' (small seedlings) can be procured from the nurseries and planted in the beds or transplanted into bigger pots. Certain seasonals like Chrysanthemums can be raised by stem cuttings. Plants like Dahlias can be propagated by division of clumps.

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Ceramic or vitrified?

GREEN SENSE

We are in an age today where it is not possible to live only with natural materials. Examples of living with nature like the uncontacted tribes of Amazon, experiments by Henry David Thoreau or solitary Buddhist meditations are more of exceptions than rules.

The A to Z of construction which was once done by local natural materials, today witness varieties of manufactured and transported materials, be it in America or Zambia.

While manufacturing ensures quality, comfort and sophistication, it leads to high consumption of energy, material resources and in essence carbon footprint. However, it is not fair to dismiss them only on that count without looking at their merits and necessities. Going by the increasing need for built areas in urban contexts, it is not possible to build only with nature, yet total dependence on high carbon materials with huge environmental impact is equally not fair.

In such a delicate situation, discussing ceramic and vitrified tiles is appropriate not only to help choose between the two but also to chart a road map ahead.

Basic ceramic technology, processed earth fired at high temperatures, theoretically is age old with remnants found from the classical age of the Chinese and Greek. In modern times, found to be good in resisting water, ceramic became popular with bathrooms and later generally with all flooring.

They have a durable surface, varied patterns and good glazing. With easy availability and execution, ceramic tiles are a good choice towards saving money and mass construc-

tion. Among the major drawbacks of ceramic is the visibility of joint lines which over the years tend to develop a blackish shade. The surface sometimes chips off due to heavy wear and tear, while some tile finish are very slippery.

As the technology progressed, vitrified tiles entered the market, which are technically same as ceramic tiles, but have the top surface especially finished, compared to the lower part. The thickness of this vitrified surface is an important criterion in both cost and durability.

Cheaper quality vitrified tiles tend to crack on this surface if they are very thin, while the better quality tiles are costlier, often on a par with granite and marble, making us ponder over our choices.

Over the decades, vitrified tiles have overshadowed the ceramic tiles with prices dropping and patterns increasing, often coming with look alike surfaces of even wood or marble. The joints can be done paper thin with no groove there, yet large floor areas can be covered in a short time.

Despite all the above advantages of ceramic and vitrified, for those ecologically inclined, both the materials could be among the last options, unless not avoidable. They come with high embodied energy, cannot be reused, appear odd with natural materials and let sophistication define architecture rather than design itself.

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Labyrinth as landscape element gets popular

Broad and flat landscapes give an expansive feel and can be experienced in a single glance from any spot. A garden must be visualised not as a two dimensional picture, but as a sculpture - a sculpture in three dimensions. In contrary, to create mystery in the landscape, a typical architectural frame is required.



Landscape architects add an element of mystery to gardens by adopting labyrinths.

A strong use of architecture can greatly add mystery to a lush, sensual look of the garden. Architectural elements such as hedges, fences and walls may be used in combination with paths to shape the experience of a vista with a focal point in a negative or positive space to instil drama into the landscape to energise it and bring it to life. An element of curiosity can be introduced for a visitor as he moves through the place. Design aspects can be such that they make him wonder as to what is in store ahead while negotiating the curves and paths of a garden. A well conceived frame work in landscape gives the place its signature and a feeling of seclusion and mystery.

In recent times to incorporate that element of mystery in landscape, the form of labyrinth is adopted by the landscape architects. The notable labyrinth form of landscape is located in the

central garden of Getty Center at Los Angeles. The 1,34,000-square-foot Central Garden is the work of artist Robert Irwin.

Planning for the garden began in 1992, construction started in 1996, and the garden was completed in the year 1997. Irwin was quoted as saying that the Central Garden 'is a sculpture in the form of a garden, which aims to be art'. A maze of azaleas floats in the pool, around which is a series of speciality gardens. More than 500 varieties of plant material are used for the Central Garden, but the selection is 'always changing, never twice the same'. Labyrinth is a symbol known to exist for at least for 4,000 years. Thought to enhance right brain activity, different cultures and religions have used it as a repre-

sentation for the journey of life. A hiatus for quite a long period later, the concept of labyrinth is back as a favourite these days and most of the contemporary labyrinths could be found set up in outdoor environment. In Mahabharata, the labyrinth form called 'Padmavyuha' or 'Chakravyuha' was used to trap the enemy in warfare. Abhimanyu, son of Arjuna who knew how to penetrate into such an arrangement was killed as he was unaware of the exit route. It has become a popular design element in landscaping throughout the world.

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Real estate web application portal

Offering a comprehensive range of services and solutions for residential, commercial, urban and rural properties, property management services, 'www.propiedad.co.in', a real estate web application portal was launched in the city.

According to a press release issued here, the portal acts like a marketplace where everyone related directly or indirectly to the real estate including agents, sellers, buyers, investors, property advisors can meet-share-search on a common platform.

The application launched by Sitosys eMedia Pvt. Ltd has been developed on .NET technology platform with various features like Interoperability, Common Language Runtime Engine and Security. Several real estate players such as PBEL, Aliens Group, Ramky Group, Sampada Homes, Awicon, Incor Infrastructure, Sri Nilaya Constructions, Bricks and Stones and Sri Sri Group were already on board, the release said. Vijay Kashyap Reddy, Managing Director, Sitosys eMedia said that the two most common business models in Propiedad property portal were the sub-

scription model, which charges agents and brokerages on a per-listing or per-listing feed basis and the free-to-list, pay-to-upgrade model. "Alongside these, there is also free-to-list provision that would generate revenue by selling products such as on-site advertising," he said. Over the next two months, properties in Warangal, Visakhapatnam, Tirupati, Kurnool, Rajahmundry and Vijayawada would also be featured on Propiedad and by July 2013, major cities like Bengaluru, Chennai and Kochi

would also be covered, he said. The portal promises hassle-free browsing, effective resources and tools to help property buyers to search in the local listings as well as the long distance listings and a dedicated logins and space for the realty industry related users and professionals. "The site will be updated on daily basis. The ease of use with a combination of competitive subscription rates will give a better service with a better experience for a better price," added Mr. Reddy.

T LALITH SINGH

For those who love luxury

Penthouses comprise almost all amenities that one can think of, right from modular kitchens to puja rooms, to intercoms to television sets, full-fledged security and water supply and other such facilities and cater to a very niche segment, writes **RASHI TIWARY**

Penthouses, a common term in the world of the rich and luxurious, are steadily gaining popularity despite the rising rental and sale costs.

Characterized by large open spaces, so much so, that one can light a fire in the winter, plan barbecues or even set up a kitchen garden, penthouses are clearly part of the luxury segment and therefore have a very different clientele.

They comprise almost all amenities that one can think of, right from modular kitchens to puja rooms, to intercoms to television sets, full-fledged security and water supply and other such facilities.

Puja Malhan, a resident of Banjara Hills, says, "Penthouses are comfortable even for those who want to keep pets.

Besides, it gives children ample space to play and one can just sit outside in the garden and sip tea or enjoy any other activity."

Unlike in the case of flats or apartments, penthouses usually come fully furnished. Most agents or owners will tell you that all you need to bring is a briefcase,



LAVISH: Penthouses are steadily gaining popularity despite the rising rental and sale costs.

everything else is set up. Costs for renting penthouses vary greatly and are in proportion to the luxury elements provided. For instance, a fully furnished penthouse could cost a monthly rental of anywhere from about Rs.30,000 to Rs.2,00,000. On M.G. Road, a penthouse of 1,500-2,000 square feet would be avail-

able for around Rs.30, 000 while one spread over 2,000 square feet at Jubilee Hills comes at an exorbitant Rs.1,60,000. A penthouse of more or less the same area would cost around Rs. 60,000 in Mehdiapatnam. In Banjara Hills, a 1500-2000 square feet pent house would come at a monthly price of Rs.

45,000. Due to such steep prices, penthouses often remain vacant for months together. Getting a tenant willing to shell out such a price is often an arduous task. "For those who are sceptical about the summer months (given that penthouses are usually on the terrace or topmost floors), a

range of options are available," says Amer Akber, a resident of Masab Tank, who owns a penthouse.

"For one, most penthouses have several windows, so opening all of them to facilitate cross-ventilation is one option. Secondly, a green canopy can be put on top of the penthouse, the kind that is used in greenhouses and nurseries so that it radiates the light and allows only partial sunlight to filter in. And thirdly, because penthouses are part of the luxury segment, most owners would be able to afford air-conditioners or air-coolers. Alternately, there's also the option of false ceilings," he elaborates.

Rituparna Sur, who lives in a penthouse in Gachibowli, says, "I don't mind the summers at all. I get an incredibly good view of the sky and I am happy with that".

Some penthouses are also given out for commercial use especially to start-up organizations that are either low on capital or urgently need a plot to commence business. For those who love luxury, a penthouse is the best option albeit not always viable.

Heavy duty water treatment plant launched

An advanced technology water treatment plant that works on reverse osmosis and is useful for entire water needs of a home, from drinking to cooking and bathing, has been launched by Shivsu Canadian Clear International.

Rugged

According to a press release issued here, the plant is heavy duty and rugged in design and suited for pure water supply to single households, apartments, bungalows, villas, schools, colleges, community centres and even townships. Residents of apartments and townships



Shivsu Canadian Clear launches advanced technology water treatment plant.

can opt for supply through a metered system to the tap connections of their choice.

The operation of the plant has been described as easy, just demanding the on and off

operation of the switch. The water for purification would be automatically drawn from sump or collection tank and high performance filters with superior quality membranes remove the physical impurities and even the dissolved chemicals like calcium, magnesium, chloride, etc., the company said. The purified water gets sent to overhead tank and rejected water can be used for gardening. The product available in capacities of 250, 500 and 1,000 litres/hour comes in a price range of Rs.1.25 lakh to Rs.2.50 lakh, the release added.