

Pentas lanceolata 'Kaleidoscope' series

Equally happy in sun or shade, these plants bloom in a rainbow of hues from spring until frost

Jimmy Turner

Pentas are some of the most versatile bedding plants I know — that's why they've won a spot in my heart and consistently win spots in my landscapes. Heat-loving and constant-flowering, they grow equally well in sun or shade, look good *en masse* or in containers and aren't picky about soil. And these are just a few of the qualities that endear this plant to me and many other gardeners.

Kaleidoscope, a recently bred series from Benary Seed company of Germany, is just the right size for landscape use and is super-floriferous. At 18 to 24 inches tall, it is not too small or too big, but just the perfect size for home landscapes or containers. Its foliage is compact and mounding and will never need pruning, pinching or staking. You won't notice the foliage much, however, since this plant is always covered in 2- to 3-inch clusters of flowers.

All pentas need high heat to flower. Fortunately, that isn't a problem in Texas. When other bedding plants are starting to crisp and fry in our hot weather, Kaleidoscope starts to shine. If planted in March or early April, the plants will grow slowly until the temperatures hit the upper 80s. Daytime temperatures in the 90s and 100s is what these plants crave. The hotter it is, the more flowers they produce and the faster they grow!

The one requirement Kaleidoscope has is well-drained soil. Heavy, saturated soils can be deadly to them. If you aren't lucky enough to live on sandy soil, then simply amend your clay with organic matter or expanded shale. I also recommend incorporating fertilizer into the bed before planting along with monthly feedings thereafter to keep the plants vigorous and flowering.

Pentas are my "silver bullet" in the garden — they grow equally well in full sun or shade and flower constantly in both, but perhaps slightly more heavy in full sun.

Kaleidoscope currently comes in five colors. They are Carmine, a bright-rosy pink; Deep Red, a dark, true red; Lilac, a soft, lavender-pink; Red Lace, with dark red flowers and white anthers that really make the color pop; and my favorite,



Above: *Kaleidoscope Appleblossom*. Right: *Kaleidoscope Red Lace*.

Appleblossom, a bicolor with light pink flowers centered with deep rose.

I like using the dark red colors with purple fountain grass (*Pennisetum setaceum* 'Rubrum') or purple foliage ornamental sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas* 'Blackie'). Appleblossom and Lilac are incredible mixed with the soft flowers of euphorbia Diamond Frost or white impatiens. I recommend spacing plants at 10 to 12 inches in the landscape.

If you are looking for plants that will blossom from April until first frost, then look for Kaleidoscope pentas at your local nursery. ★

About the author: Jimmy Turner is the Director of Horticulture Research at the Dallas Arboretum. Visit www.dallasplanttrials.org for more information on his trials.

AT A GLANCE

Latin Name: *Pentas lanceolata* 'Kaleidoscope' series

Plant Type: summer annual

Flowers: clusters of small, star-shaped flowers

Foliage: dark green

Mature height: 2 feet

Hardiness: summer annual except in Zone 10

Soil: well-drained

Exposure: full sun or shade

Water usage: medium

Sources: local nurseries