Dianthus
‘Elation’ series

Jimmy Turner

Above: Elation series dianthus have proven to be one of the best in Texas trial gardens.

You may think I only search for the neatest, newest and rarest plants in the Dallas Arboretum Trials program, but what I’m really looking for are the best plants, and that includes the best varieties of such garden standards as lantana, petunia, impatiens, begonia, pansy and dianthus.

Many believe that all varieties of these garden standards are pretty much the same. They aren’t. I test hundreds of varieties of our most common plants looking for that new variety or old standby that is the “best of the best.”

Annual-type dianthus is probably second only to pansies in popularity in the South for cool-season color. Whether planted in fall and over-wintered, or in early spring, few plants give such a reliable performance.

The genus *Dianthus* is seeing a renaissance in breeding currently with new complex hybrids of multiple species entering the...
I find that young plants are more vigorous and heavier flowering. They aren’t reliably heat-tolerant enough for me to classify them as a true perennial.

The Elation series is one of the “new kids on the block” when it comes to bedding-plant-type dianthus varieties and may not be easy to find. If your local retail nursery doesn’t carry them, then look for one of the other two popular series: ‘Ideal’ and ‘Telstar.’ If you happen to shop someplace where they don’t list the variety or series on the label, then I recommend shopping elsewhere! ※

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

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**At a glance**

- **Latin Name:** Dianthus hybrid ‘Elation’ series
- **Common Name:** dianthus
- **Plant Type:** cool-season annual
- **Flowers:** 8 colors ranging from white, purple to crimson
- **Foliage:** compact, green mounds
- **Mature height:** 12 inches
- **Hardiness:** annual
- **Soil:** well-drained
- **Exposure:** full sun
- **Water usage:** medium
- **Sources:** local nurseries

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Above: Choose from a range of hues, including white, crimson, coral, scarlet, violet, rose, red, white, and pink bicolor.

market. Originally almost all of the “annual” types of dianthus were pure *Dianthus chinensis*, but now breeders are adding *D. barbatus* (sweet William) and other species to improve heat tolerance, winter hardiness, double flowers and much more.

The Elation series came through our trials a few years back claiming earlier and more uniform flowering and a compact growth habit. It did all of this and much more. In appearance, it resembles most other annual dianthus varieties, with compact, dark-green foliage and multi-flowered clusters of 1-inch flowers on stems that reach 10 inches tall.

Elation series was one of the earliest to flower, making it especially good for fall planting. However, what we liked most about this series was its ability to keep flowering and reflowering. When you deadhead dianthus after flowering, typically the second wave of flowers isn’t that impressive, but Elation has a second bloom that rivals the first. Also, Elation has incredible heat tolerance and has lasted longer into the summer than most other varieties.

The Elation series of dianthus currently comes in 8 colors: white, crimson, coral, violet, scarlet, rose, red and pink bicolor. All of the colors in the series begin to flower at the same time, which is important if you are using them in mixes.

Elation series, like all dianthus, performs best in full-sun with well-drained soil. I recommend fertilizing at planting to get the plants off to a good start. In my opinion, all annual dianthus perform better if fall-planted along with your pansies. Those set out in fall will be twice the size of spring-planted ones and give you a larger and longer flower display.

With its extra-long flower period, Elation also makes a great transitional plant in spring. Planted in early March, it will give your garden color until the weather warms up enough for summer annuals. If you live south of Zone 7, then Elation, like other annual types of dianthus, may perennialize for a year or two, but