

Petunia (Peh-Toon-Yuh)

Solanaceae

Perennial Grown as an annual

All Zones

The days are getting longer and warmer and I'm thinking about Spring/Summer color for my baskets. The first plant that pops into my mind is Petunias. They have been around for a very long time and no garden would be complete without them. When I was a kid, I would insist on getting a six-pack of those large purple and pink striped petunias to put in our planter. In fact, my mother used to call me Petunia! And to this day, I still purchase petunias every year. They have come a long way and have so many exciting varieties.

Three years ago, I picked up a couple of the new Proven Winners, Vista Bubblegum and Supertunias. They have a charming bubble gum pink flower. The petals are somewhat small and simple, but this plant produces like crazy. It is a bit confusing; there are regular bedding petunias, Surfinia, Supertunias, Wave petunias, and Calibrochoas, which look like mini petunias, and all kinds of new hybrids. To sort it all out I went online to www.provenwinners.com, it gives the descriptions of the plants. Then I went to my local nursery and asked them to order for me. So don't let the large selection scare you.

Vista Bubblegum is self cleaning, so no deadheading required. I planted it in a 16" hanging basket by my front porch where it kept growing and growing. Later in the season, it had reached 2 ½ feet long and was nice and bushy too; what a show stopper. To my amazement it did winter over. However San Andreas is not super cold; and I do religiously use frost cover. Last year I added two more plants in smaller hanging baskets and had stunning results: the flowers lasted into November. Out of all the varieties I have tried, Vista Bubblegum, Supertunias have given me the best results. Though I must admit the Superbells come close.

Care is easy; keep them well watered but not wet. Fertilize regularly. I put plant food spikes in my baskets and supplemental feed with a watered down solution of Beastie Bloomz every two weeks. One might think this is a lot of fertilizer, but these guys are heavy feeders and the blooms prove it. They are full sun, but in hotter areas they will appreciate a bit of shade. Give them a try; you won't regret it.

Novella Springer

Calaveras Master Gardener

San Andreas