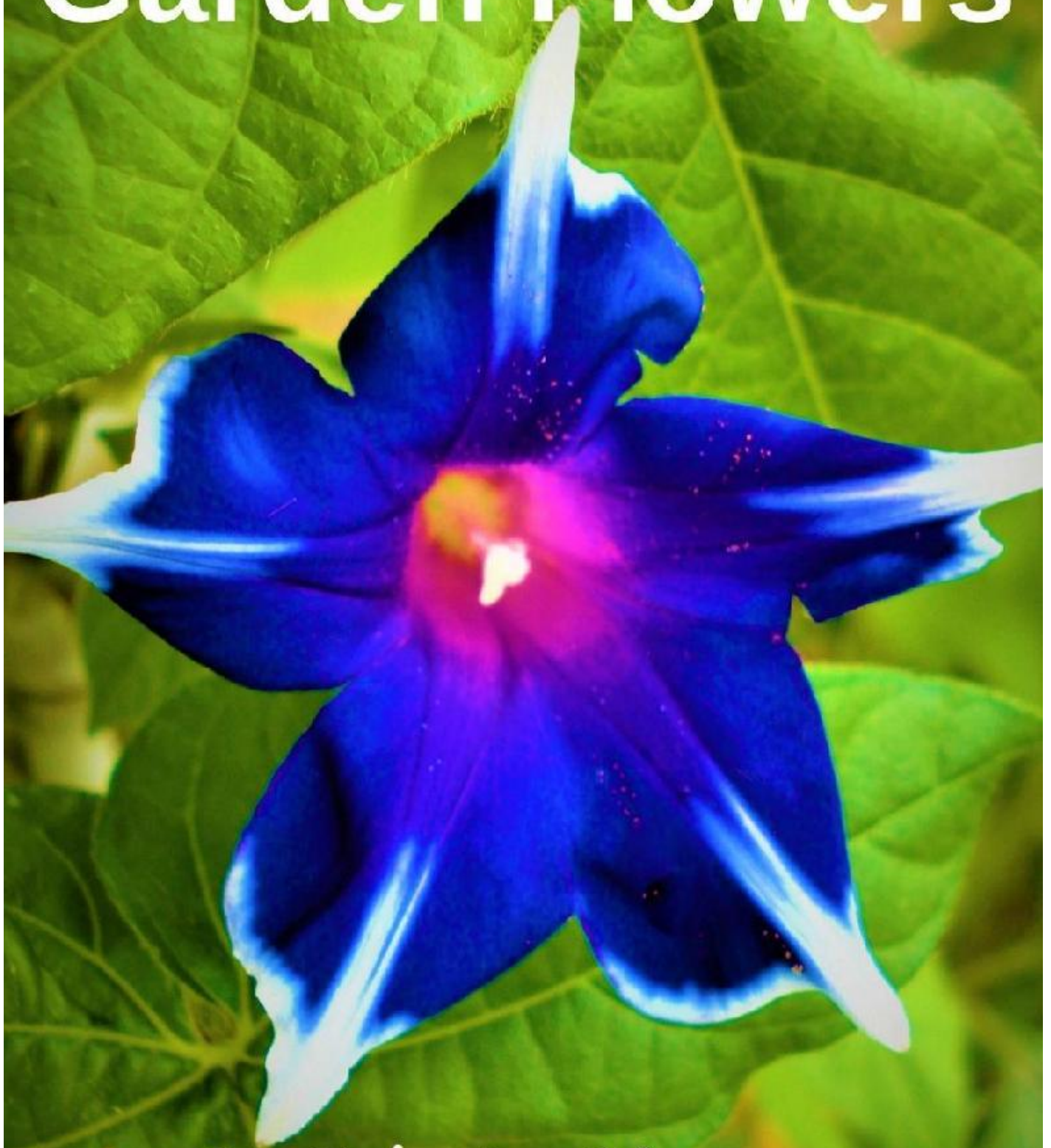


Extraordinary Garden Flowers



G. Edwin Varner

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EXTRAORDINARY GARDEN FLOWERS

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Written by G. Edwin Varner.

Preface

This ebook is about growing unique and memorable flowering plants to add to your flower beds and borders. Many of them provide excellent color, are easy to grow, and sure to attract attention. You can purchase some of these plants from garden centers or finding them by searching online nurseries.

This guide is not the definitive listing of all “fascinating” plants. There are many other species and varieties you can include in your garden beds and borders. I selected the plants listed in this ebook as ones I have grown and admired or ones I have researched and wish to raise.

The information on each plant may contain inaccuracies about their growing conditions and hardiness.

Each plant has its USDA hardiness zones, best growth conditions, and recommended varieties to find and grow. Please be aware these plants may not be available, discontinued, or replaced for better varieties by nurseries. Some are so rare we may never find them.

The following plants use their Latin name first, then by a common name or names.

The digital photos are of the flowers at my home, garden centers, public gardens, and Creative Commons (CC0) licensed images.

Introduction

Home gardeners have always had an eye toward growing strange and beautiful flowers in their gardens. It is inevitable. New gardeners may grow the basic bedding flowers offered each spring in garden centers but, over time, gravitate toward unique, strange, and fascinating plants.

It's not that we want beds and borders of ugly or weird flowers, but to add those unusual and intriguing plants that stimulates our attention and curiosity. Searching for and growing unique garden flowers makes gardening more fun and entertaining.

This ebook highlights those "unusual" flowering plants endangered of being forgotten. They are gorgeous in petal color, fascinating in form, and enjoyable to watch as they grow in your garden.

Presented below is a selection of flowers you can grow from seed or purchase plants from nurseries. You may have to hunt for them via the internet because they are unusual and rare.

Experience the profound wonder of nature's beauty when admiring these floral curiosities. Their uniqueness and unusualness will make your garden a standout from all others.

Portions of the following text may include information copied from my earlier ebooks. Here, I have included additional plants and updated earlier informational material.

To find plants or seeds of the following species and varieties, please visit your nearby larger garden centers or search online to find specialty nurseries that grow and sell them.

Aristolochia – Dutchman’s Vine; Calico Vine

*Aristolochia gigantea; littoralis or Aristolochia
elegans*



**One additional reason why you may consider becoming a
vegetarian.**

Most species of this vine originate in tropical areas of Central and South America. Once discovered by European explorers (and exploiters), these vines spread elsewhere in warmer regions of the world. Later, hybridization would create new and even more weird and exotic forms.

There are hundreds of species scattered worldwide, but they all have a similar flower structure. They differ in size and color, but they resemble meerschaum pipes. “What’s that?” you may ask. They are large smoking pipes once famous in the Netherlands and throughout Europe.

Depending on the species, the flowers vary from small, yellowish-green to large, deep brown-purple with white or yellowish veins. The petal colors resemble a slab of meat left out in the scorching sun. The blossom also has a noticeable “rotten meat” or carrion-corpse aroma. Guess what pollinates these flowers? Flies. This vine fools them into thinking they are about to enjoy a rotten meat feast and a great place to lay their eggs. Sorry flies, it will not happen.

These are great vines to grow and to admire for any garden. Don’t worry about my description of rotting meat and flies. You will notice none of this — unless you stick your nose deep inside the flowers.

Our imagination of the flower’s appearance can go further. The old Latin name of this vine roughly translates to “the best way to have childbirth.” Wait one minute. Weird-looking smoking pipes and birthing babies? Yes, go figure!

The flower’s appearance ‘somewhat’ resembles a human fetus in a womb. Ancient people would extract juices from these flowers to help deliver babies pain-free. If you want to become a do-it-yourself midwife, don’t try this method. The reason is, the fluid and extracts are toxic. How mothers, and I would also assume babies, lived after being administered this “brew” is mind-boggling.

Hardy from zones 9 and above, they grow best in full to partial sunlight, fertile, moist, and well-drained soils. Under the best conditions, they can grow to well over 20 feet tall. Even in temperate areas of the world, gardeners can grow them as annuals with good growth and plenty of blossoms. Flowering continues for most of the summer until the coolness of fall.

Like many other vines, this plant can cover trellises, fences, arbors, posts, and any other tall supporting structure. They can grow well in

containers (with support) and rise to about eight feet tall. The dark green leaves are heart-shaped and display the annoying habit of hiding the flowers—part of the time, at least.

Aster – Climbing Carolina Aster

Aster carolinianus or *Ampelaster carolinianus*



It gets by with a little help from its friends.

Wait one moment. A climbing Aster? Yes, you read that correctly. This unusual Aster is the botanical equivalent of Superman, for it climbs and, if given enough time, will leap tall buildings in a single bound. No, not really—on all counts. This late fall blooming Aster does not climb, nor is it a vine. It produces long, woody stems that weave in among shrubs, tall perennials, fences, or other supporting structures.

You can refer to it as a rambler, or a wanderer, just like some of our climbing roses. It cannot wrap around objects like a vine, but its botanical neighbors help it stand up. During the summer, it rambles up

here-and-there among its neighboring perennials and shrubs, happy and carefree (supposing plants can express emotions). Like all Asters, it would love as much sunshine and fertile soil as possible.

Then it blooms in the late fall, producing a mass of bluish-lavender flowers highlighted by yellow stamens. The blossoms have a sweet, honey fragrance. I was skeptical at first but detected a tart, wild honey scent. It is not overpowering, but it is very noticeable and surprising, coming from an Aster.

It is a native of the Southeastern areas of the United States. If Superman's weakness is Kryptonite, then this Aster's disadvantage is with cold temperatures. It is only hardy from zones 7 to 10. It will die back to the ground in lesser zones, resulting in a loss of heavy blooming later in the fall.

I recommend growing this rare treasure in containers for colder zone gardeners, supporting its stems with bamboo or a simple trellis. Keep it growing outside until the threat of a killing frost. Then, bring the pot indoors to enjoy the fragrant blossoms. After blooming, keep it in a cool, dark basement to rest until spring.

Because of a recent naming revision of the Aster family, the Climbing Aster has a new genus called *Ampelaster*. Don't lose sleep over this, but it can become confusing. I still like naming all Asters—as Asters.

Berkheya - Purple Thistle

Berkheya purpurea



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Getting directly to the point about this plant.

I can summarize the appearance of this plant in a few words. It is prickly, spiny, spiky, thorny, sharp, and beautiful. What? Beautiful? How is that word associated with all those other horrendous adjectives? Well, several plants come to mind when associating beauty with having prickly characteristics. Roses come to mind immediately. This plant, however, is a type of thistle native to South Africa.

Perennial to zone 6 and above, the furry but shiny, spiny silvery-green leaves and stems culminate in midsummer with clusters of gorgeous

purple aster-like flowers. The sharp stems rise to nearly three feet tall above the prickly rosettes of leaves.

This plant enjoys growing in well-drained, fertile soil in as much sunlight as possible. Flowering occurs by midsummer and extends until a fall frost.

If you need a reminder, this is not a cut flower by any means because of the non-touchy nature of their stems. Like many other thorny flowers, its motto is “enjoy my looks, but don’t you dare touch me.”

I would advise separating this perennial from your other flowers in your bed or border. I am sure you know how it feels to grab a common thistle plant while weeding. This devilish beauty can really wallop a horrendous pain in your hand. For this reason, I refuse to grow it in my garden unless I wear a suit of armor.

Zulu Warrior is one particularly stunning variety to grow (if you are so daring). It is slightly less spiny on the stems. It grows less tall and is bushier than the species. The seeds germinate quickly and can be in-bloom by midsummer with several three-inch diameter, lavender to purple blossoms. You may think this is a newly discovered plant, but the famous Kew Gardens was growing it in 1917. British explorers to Africa must have returned home with some seeds.

Speaking of seeds — you can purchase them from larger seed companies. A few large mail-order nurseries may offer plants

Calceolaria – Pocketbook Plant; Slipper Flower; Pouch Flower

Calceolaria x herbeohybrida



Just don't confuse the functions of a purse and bedpan.

The reason for these nicknames is for this annual's unusual flower shape. It depends on your perspective — almost like a physiological response. My sister, a retired nurse, says the flowers look like colorful bedpans. Only a nurse (and maybe a not-so-stuck-up doctor) could describe these flowers in this unique way. Perhaps this is a reason she prefers not to grow them. The pocketbook analogy (supposedly for I am clueless about antique purses) is from the 1960s to early 1970s era

one-piece purse. The pouch and slipper references speak for themselves.

Not all flowers sold in garden centers are adaptable for growing in a bed or border. Usually grown as potted plants instead of bedding, *Calceolaria* is sensitive to outdoor temperatures. They prefer cooler growing and will suffer under hot and humid conditions. This is explainable, for they are native to the high elevations of the Andes mountains.

There are many species with greater numbers of hybrid varieties available from seed companies. Greenhouse-grown potted plants will provide you with a few weeks of colorful splendor on a windowsill, patio table, or in a large container placed on a deck. These plants prefer partly shady locations (early morning sunshine is ideal) and well-drained, fertile potting soil. Unlike most other annual plants, this ten-inch-tall plant blooms from early spring until midsummer. Afterward, when temperatures steadily climb, flower production decreases.

When the flowers bloom, you can see them a mile away. The fused petals are brightly colored yellow, red, orange, and a combination of shades, sometimes with black spots for contrast.

Look for the variety *Calceolaria x herbeohybrida* **Orange Red Eye** (shown above). It is in the new **Calynopsis®** lineage having larger flowers and taller stems. This new group of plants looks stunning in spring-offered potted plants.

The Calynopsis® varieties bloom longer — most extend into late summer — if exposed to shady and cool conditions. This hybrid line has the potential for outdoor bedding. Still, the best option is growing and enjoying them in containers. Here, you can admire each blossom close-up. Once you appreciate these flowers' intense colors, you may become addicted to growing them each year.

Ceratotheca – South African Foxglove

Ceratotheca triloba



Snapdragons on steroids.

Not related to the biennial foxglove (*Digitalis*), this curious fuzzy annual plant has similar-shaped blossoms, only more substantial but not as colorful. The petals are pure white or a delightful, creamy lavender with violet stripes within the elongated throat.

Related to Snapdragons (*Antirrhinum*), it is native to South Africa and hardy from zones 9 to 10. This plant can grow to over six feet in a fertile flower bed but is usually much less tall. It makes an excellent show in a large container and is of a controllable height.

Plant it in full to partial sunlight, fertile, and well-drained soil to achieve maximum blooming throughout the summer. It will bloom into the fall if you periodically trim off the developing seed pod stems. It is also drought-tolerant, so you need not worry about watering it if you are away for a prolonged time.

Imported as seeds into the United States in 1805, this annual plant never became well known to American gardeners for some unexplained reason. In Victorian England, it became the rage in British gardening society and later on... forgotten. Growing it must have been a 'fad.' After becoming bored with it, gardeners became obsessed with raising other unusual flowers. All gardeners have a psychological condition similar to 'shiny object syndrome,' but here it is called 'pretty flower syndrome.' We always gravitate to the newest beautiful flowers to grow and enjoy.

You cannot find these plants in garden centers, but larger seed companies will have seeds available. Don't worry, for this plant is easy to grow from seed and raise to enjoy those eye-catching, beautiful flowers.

Clitoria – Butterfly Pea Vine

Clitoria ternatea



The “birds and bees” connection: Part One.

If this ebook had the same rating system as movies and television shows, it might include something like this: “*Rated PG-13. Parental*

guidance is advised.” What makes this vine so unique to allow such a cautionary rating?

Even with the basic Sweet Pea-style look, the flowers’ structure has evolved a ‘somewhat’ resemblance to human female genitals—precisely, the clitoris. Now is the time to smile, giggle and mumble to everyone. Okay, let’s calm our vivid imaginations down and admire the profound beauty of these blossoms. That stunning deep, sky-blue color of the petals is so eye-catching.

It is native to the tropical areas of Malaysia, Thailand, and other regions of Asia. Sometime around 1739, explorers shipped seeds back home as soon as possible to show-off, brag about, and talk about those “alluring” blue petals. Cue more smiles, giggles, and mumblings again.

Today, this plant grows wild in many tropical areas around the world. They don’t appear to be invasive — surprising, for many vines can become so in non-native regions of the world.

The tendrils twirl about, wrapping around any supporting structure. Under the best growing conditions, such as plenty of sunlight, fertile and moist soil, they can climb to over 10 feet tall. Not a giant, in any sense of the word, but it makes a great fast-growing and long-blooming annual.

Seeds are challenging to find, but a few famous English seed companies have some in stock. A rare pure white form is also available — somewhere.

Colchicum – Autumn Crocus or Naked Ladies

Colchicum autumnale



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How mistaken identities arise — especially with Naked Ladies.

Common flower names, or nicknames, can create confusion for gardeners when trying to identify specific plants. That's why a Swedish botanist named Carl Linnaeus (1707 - 1778) devised a method, called the binomial nomenclature, of specifically naming each plant and animal. Even long-time home gardeners (ahh...like me) can become deceived by common names on what they think a specific flower is or

isn't. This confusion may lead to unfortunate occurrences, such as poisoning if your identification is wrong.

Here is a mistaken identity case involving two unrelated plants with a similar nickname, appearance, and bloom time. *Crocus sativus* (described later) blooms in the fall with blossoms looking like those of a close relation, *Crocus vernus*, the spring-blooming Crocus. Nicknamed the Saffron Crocus, it also has the moniker of the Fall Crocus.

The other unfortunate common name is Autumn Crocus, shared with this section's subject, *Colchicum autumnale*. This plant is poisonous and should never be used as a saffron substitute. Here, the flowers look similar but are larger and also bloom in the fall. At a glance, who can tell the difference without having them bloom side-by-side?

Having not grown them, I made this mistake repeatedly each fall when viewing beds of these flowers. I remember telling my sister those flowers were Fall Crocus, unknowingly being mistaken. Now, I (and hopefully you also) know how mistaken identities arise.

Okay, lesson learned. Let me get on track and fully describe this unusual and beautiful plant.

There are few fall garden flowers to admire. Chrysanthemums and Asters always steal the show — and rightfully so — when they bloom with vivid colors. Largely forgotten and rarely planted is ***Colchicum autumnale***. As mentioned before, it looks like a giant Crocus and is commonly mistaken as one.

One massive difference is this plant is a member of the Lily family, while Crocus is of the Iris family. Crocus grows from corms, while this plant forms bulbs. In the fall, the flowers emerge first, and then in the following spring, the leaves finally grow. They die-back by summer, and the bulb lies dormant until fall when the “naked” flowers emerge.

If you want another fascinating plant (described later in this ebook) having a similar growth habit (and a nickname of “Naked Ladies”), it is *Lycoris squamigera*. Here we go playing the name-game again!

Colchicum autumnale is very poisonous, for it contains a toxic compound called colchicine. Like many other plant poisons, when diluted to a safe level, it can ease or control health problems, as, in this case, to help ease gout. This chemical is also used to multiply chromosome numbers in both plant and animal tissue. For plants, this is beneficial for creating new hybrids.

Colchicum grows well in full sunlight to partial shade and in well-drained, fertile soil. You may plant the bulbs within other plants, including lawns or groundcovers. I once admired a large clump growing within a large swath of Periwinkle (*Vinca minor*). Once planted, they are virtually maintenance-free, except for the occasional watering if the soil becomes too dry in the fall when they are blooming.

You may find it difficult to purchase these bulbs in garden centers. Your best option is to locate them by an internet search of specialty bulb nurseries.

Colocasia – Elephant Ears

Colocasia esculenta



No need to feed it peanuts.

Prepare yourself for being amazed, awed, and slightly overwhelmed when you first encounter this plant.

When at a garden center, I had mixed feelings when I first encountered it. Its enormous height and the massive leaves and flowers thrilled but also partially intimidated me. I felt like that of Lemuel Gulliver in Jonathan Swift's *"Gulliver's Travels."* It was when he encountered the land and giant people of Brobdingnag. This plant is amazing!

Growers nickname it "Elephant Ears" or "Taro." The dark green leaves have a coarse texture with prominent veins. Some varieties have bronze

and even pure black (dark-purple) leaves.



There are clusters of large, white arum-like flowers (shown above). Just like the leaves, they are also larger than usual. The flower has a modified leaf called a spathe, and the stamens or pistils are on the central yellow spadix. There is a slightly foul odor associated with these types of flowers that attract pollinating flies.

Easy to grow from bulbs, we can plant Elephant Ears in the garden (remember, it needs plenty of space) or enormous pots — like halved whiskey barrels.

It prefers fertile, well-drained soil, plenty of water, fertilizer, and full sunlight to partial shade to get the maximum growing size. The bulbs are hardy from zones 8 to 11, but a freeze will kill the outermost leaves. Northern growers will need to bring the potted bulbs indoors or in a heated garage for the winter.

You can find these bulbs in many larger garden centers or online bulb specialty nurseries.

Cosmos – Chocolate Cosmos

Cosmos atrosanguineus



At least we don't have to worry about velociraptors lurking about in the garden.

There is a famous line in the 1993 movie *Jurassic Park* where actor Jeff Goldblum's character, Dr. Ian Malcolm, says, "No. I'm, I'm simply saying that life, uh... finds a way." Although he was referring to the discovery that the supposedly sterile dinosaurs quickly developed a genetic way to procreate, this fascinating plant also has a similar plan.

Native to Mexico, this plant was once common but became very rare. What happened? In the past, all available plants eventually lost the ability to produce seeds. They became sterile and needed propagation

by cuttings or by tubers—until now. In 2010, someone discovered a fertile plant producing viable seed. Never underestimate Mother Nature! Now, seeds are slowly being available to private and commercial companies.

Look out for **Chocamocha**, which was first commercially seed-grown in 2012. This attractive plant is a tender perennial that resembles and grows like a small Dahlia, but with a flower similar to the regular Cosmos. The milk chocolate-scented blossoms are a deep garnet or crimson red but appear almost black. It blooms in midsummer until a killing frost. It forms small finger-like tubers that can be dug and saved over the winter in slightly moist peat moss.

Plant them in full sunlight, fertile but well-drained soil. These plants can grow in containers, placing the plants where you can enjoy the delicious fragrance.

Craspedia – Drumstick Flower; Billy Balls

Craspedia globosa



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No, this is not a marsupial daisy.

When you think of Australia and New Zealand, you immediately visualize their marsupial animals, such as kangaroos, koala bears, and Tasmanian Devils. Hey, let's also include the egg-laying mammal, the duck-billed platypus. But how many times do you think of their wild-looking wildflowers? Probably, never. That is a shame because these regions have fascinating native flowers.

Presented here is one such delightful botanical oddity. No, I shouldn't label it that way. Let's call it a pleasant curiosity.

Craspedia is a down-under member of the immense daisy family, appearing as yellow ping-pong balls stuck on stems. This impressionistic view is not an exaggeration.

Suspended on stiff, wiry stems above clumps of grass-like silvery-green leaves are the perfectly spherical flower-heads. These flower-heads, extending upward to almost two feet, have no ray-florets (like the large petal-like flowers of a daisy) but only the fertile florets congested within the head.

Most heads are an inch or more in diameter, but a clump of these flowers waving in the breeze all summer is mesmerizing. Florists highly value them as cut-flowers for contrasting (and conversation making) displays.

These plants are easy to grow from seed, and when garden-established, are practically carefree. They thrive in full sun and well-drained, fertile soil. Although hardy in the Australian regions, they are annuals if you live below zone 8.

You will have better luck locating seeds (possibly plants) thru online nurseries than from your local garden center.

Crocus – Saffron Crocus, Fall Crocus; Autumn Crocus

Crocus sativus



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This plant is really confused about which season it grows in.

Spring-blooming crocus (*Crocus vernus*) is an extraordinary sight pushing up from the snow-covered ground. For us cold-climate gardeners, their colorful petals are a pleasant sight for our winter-weary eyes. Of all the flowers grown in a garden, they offer a well-needed euphoric relief that winter is nearly over. Daffodils come in a close second, in my opinion.

A close cousin of *vernus* is *Crocus sativus*, whose common name of Fall Crocus explains precisely why it is a surprising eyebrow-lifting plant.

This species mirrors its spring-blooming counterpart with beautiful lavender-blue petals arising from grass-like leaves beginning in late summer. Unlike its spring cousin, each blossom sports long, bright orange to red styles and stigmas. When plucked from the flower and later dried, they are then referred to as saffron. If you are a gourmet chef (or, like me, act poorly like one), saffron is an expensive food spice and colorant.

This crocus is hardy only from zones 6 to 8 (on average). Colder zones are problematic because of deeply frozen soil, including soggy soil during the spring thaw. When planting the corms in spring, make sure they will be in full sunlight and the garden soil is very well-drained. You will have better luck in corm survival if the ground periodically becomes dry during the summer. Tulips also prefer soil conditions like this.

After a spring planting, you can expect flowering by late summer. Blooming extends for two weeks, while the grass-like leaves may sprout first, during, or after blooming.

You can purchase the corms from larger garden centers or online nurseries in the spring.

Here is an important warning: Please don't become confused by another similar-looking fall-blooming plant, *Colchicum autumnale*, described earlier. It resembles this crocus, but its flowers are much larger. It, too, has the nickname of Autumn or Fall Crocus. This warning is not only for the deceptive appearance but because all parts of it are highly poisonous if eaten.

Cuphea – Bat Face Cuphea; Tiny Mice

Cuphea llavea



Now that you mention it, by adding wings to a mouse, it will look like a bat.

If there is one plant I will grow each year, it will be this gorgeous species. My first attraction was its vivid colors of red and purple. The second attraction is the name; the flowers really do look like a bat's face and ears. I think I can see some fangs jutting from the mouth.

Another "cute" name is Tiny Mice. They apparently resemble small mice, especially with the "large ears," but my eyes cannot distinguish this appearance. No matter what color of these blossoms, you will enjoy their constant blooming from late spring to fall frost.



Native to Mexico (zones 9 and above), it can grow to over three feet tall and wide (oh what a sight that would be), but for our garden, it can only muster as a low-growing annual shrub.

Blooming abundantly over the summer, it can become an excellent addition for bedding and edging a border. These inch-long tubular blossoms draw in all the neighborhood hummingbirds and butterflies. Planting them in containers, especially hanging baskets, provides for greater eye level appeal.

No matter where you plant them, make sure they are basking in plenty of sunlight and well-drained, fertile soil. These plants dislike shade and will not bother blooming.

You can purchase potted plants from many larger garden centers. You can grow these plants from seed (if you can locate some), but it will take longer for them to grow and bloom.

Dahlia

Dahlia hybrida



If a neighbor kindly asks for a tuber — give her at least two.

Like many other popular garden flowers, Dahlias will provide you with a tremendous number of multi colorful varieties. But having lots of colors does not make any flower group or individual spectacular or unusual. There has to be “something else” that defines this accolade of uniqueness.

There are two areas I concentrated on in deciding which unique Dahlias you may wish to include in your garden. One area is in flower size, and I base the other on astonishing flower color patterns. Yes, I am

apparently contradicting myself from my earlier sentence. But when learning later about one amazing colorful Dahlia, you will understand.

Dahlias have always been a favorite tuberous garden plant since its discovery by early explorers (at the tragic degradation of indigenous people) in Mexico and extending into northern areas of South America. As a member of the vast Aster or Daisy family, over 30 species live in this broad area. Two or three species seem to be significant players in the hybridization of our present garden varieties.

I have included the following types as representatives of extraordinariness (that is a word, isn't it?).

Kelvin Floodlight (shown above) is a 1959 graduate of superior floral breeding. Yes, it has a "strange" name, but this variety may be the largest flowered dahlia created. Many growers describe it as dinner plate-sized, and I have to agree. Some blossoms are smaller, but the majority are huge. The stems are incredibly sturdy to hold up all these gargantuan flower heads.

Look at some garden catalogs and websites, for there are more colorful dinner plate-sized varieties available. Still, Kelvin, upon introduction, created a sensation for gardeners.

Kelvin has plenty of butter-yellow ray flowers (remember, all Daisy family members are composite or small flowers clustered within a central head). The color is not bright yellow but lighter, like the color of butter.

Like all other Dahlias, it is not very hardy — zone 8 and above — to survive underground during a cold winter. Suitable microclimates can extend that hardiness down to zone 6 (maybe 5). Here, I must express my "possible" witnessing of this variety surviving zone 5 winters (yes, plural) by remaining underground. This testimony is from me (via memory) as a young ten-year-old gardener-in-training. Mind you — this all takes place several millennia ago (well, in the late 1960s to be semi-precise).

My mother was envious of our neighbor's huge yellow Dahlias growing abundantly in her weed-enriched flower garden. Rita, the neighbor, was one of those "*I don't give a damn about flowers, but here they are growing in my sickly garden*" clueless type of people. As I learned from Mom, Rita never dug up her Dahlia tubers before winter. They remained underground and survived years of Siberian-caliber winters. I suspect that living within the "warmer" southern foundation soil by her house attributes to their surprising longevity.

My mother desperately wished for Rita to allow her to dig up at least one tuber. Rita always selfishly declined for some unknown reason — possibly out of upper hand spite. I offered to become a cat burglar and cunningly pilfer a tuber or cutting from Rita's derelict dahlia patch. Mom put the kibosh on that devious plan. "No! That would be stealing," she replied harshly.

Mom never got to have that dahlia grow in her flower gardens. She did not know the varietal name, so she couldn't hunt one down from the flower nurseries.

In hindsight, I believe Rita's dahlia was Kelvin Floodlight. Those yellow flower heads were enormous and so enticing, longing to live in my mother's garden. But it was not to be.



Suppose Kelvin is the largest flowered variety of Dahlia available. In that case, there must be an impressive equal and opposite small-flowered type available. There is one variety called **Rocco** (shown above — really close-up). This dahlia is for Gulliver's Lilliputians, for the flower head averages one inch (25mm) in diameter.

Its color is a striking burgundy-red or beet-root red. The flower-style is a button, ball, or pom-pom dahlia. These flower heads may be Thumbelina-small, but the whole plant corresponds with an abundance of them throughout midsummer until a fall frost. Growers always notice the shocked-look people express when they realize this is an actual dahlia.



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Speaking of another petal-shocking, eye-popping, and reality-bending Dahlia, you must grow **York and Lancaster** (shown above). Yes, it looks like Mother Nature spliced or pasted red and white petals (actually ray flowers) haphazardly.

Botanists and geneticists are debating on how this happens. A few theories (including the comical 'jumping genes' idea which occurs with petunias) may explain why there are hodgepodge colors on the flower head. Please note that each head will be different in the number of red or white petals. Some may have all red or white or a sparse few of each color. It's like a genetic slot machine in determining which color patterns will display.

Botanical historians named this variety after the English civil wars (1455 to 1487) called The War of the Roses. Two feuding political factions fought for a male heir to become king of England. Each faction

had a botanical mascot, for want of a better word. A white rose represented the House of York, while the House of Lancaster represented itself by a red rose.

I will let you search for more information about all the gory battles and how it was all resolved — bloody, as usual. Okay, this condensed history lesson has no bearing on this dahlia — only as an excellent variety name for the competing colors within a single flower head.

This dahlia has its own history, apparently “discovered” growing in a French chateau garden in 1915. Now, hold on — someone else says it was growing in a French farmer’s garden in the 1850s. Well, maybe both locations and times are right — or wrong. This dahlia is so unique and valuable it may have grown ages ago.

No matter when discovered, this dahlia still flourishes in many gardens, but don’t expect your neighborhood garden center to have it. Your best bet to find a tuber is by internet searches of rare plants or dahlia specialists.

Dianthus

Dianthus superbus



When you need to look (and smell) your very best at a job interview.

Members of the Carnation family come in all shapes, sizes, and colors. This species exhibits single, fringed or feathery, wild-looking, highly fragrant flowers covering the bushy 18-inch plants. Their colors range from pure white to lavender, pink, rosy-red, and many bicolors. Most have a gorgeous contrasting central eye color.

There is a specific variety called **Rainbow Loveliness**, which is available in many seed catalogs or nurseries. I never see this plant offered in garden centers.

One drawback with all these flowers is that they produce a tremendous number of seeds that force the plants to stop making more flowers. After the main flush of bloom, clip off the spent flower stems. This makes the plant produce more blossoms within a few weeks.

You should plant all Dianthus, including this variety, in full sunlight and well-drained soil, — with added limestone — for best flowering and winter survivability.

You need this species for your garden, especially one devoted to fragrance. Famous British gardening expert Christopher Lloyd once stated he would never want to be without this plant in his gardens. In her book *The Scented Garden*, Rosemary Verey declared this plant as “... *the ultimate in perfection in garden scents...*” Wow! What better referrals can you ask for in hiring this plant to bloom in your garden?

Do yourself a favor and grow this incredible plant. Prepare yourself for an enjoyable, colorful, and scented treat for your eyes and nose.

Dicentra – Bleeding Heart

Dicentra spectabilis or *Lamprocapnos spectabilis*



A Valentine's Day gift to Miss Money Penny from Agent 007.

Once known as *Dicentra* (and still is with us diehard gardeners), botanists now classify this outstanding spring-blooming, hardy perennial as *Lamprocapnos*. I'm sorry, but this name sounds like a newly discovered dinosaur fossil or a comical beast straight out of a Dr. Seuss book. No, I will stick with the old name.

Time for an off-beat botanical history lesson. Who knows—it may come in handy someday, but I doubt it. This delightful plant was first introduced into Europe in the 1840s by Scottish plant hunter-explorer-

extraordinaire Robert Fortune. Bobby had a knack for going to out-of-the-way worldly places to look for interesting plants. One day, he came across this charming perennial growing in China, thought it looked pretty and brought it back home.

Bob had a darker side to him, and it involved being a cunning spy— no, not your James Bond style of snooping but of seeking and pilfering (spy-talk for stealing) tea plants out of China. The British East India Company hired him to travel to China. Here, he got friendly with the locals by admiring their pretty flower gardens. When no one was looking, he stuffed a few Oriental botanical treasures into his pockets or bags. And, if, by chance, he was to visit a tea plantation—which was his actual mission—steal as many potted tea plants or cuttings as possible without the workers (and royalty) discovering his plan. You don't steal in China under the penalty of imprisonment or death. This plan sounds like a garden writer's screenplay script for a *Mission: Impossible* movie. Spoiler alert—he succeeded in his mission. We got pretty plants for our gardens and refreshing tea to sip while admiring them.

For a postscript of this historical account, growers shipped *Dicentra* plants to the United States and Canada in the late 1800s. Loved by the public, florists grew it as potted-gifts for St. Valentine's Day. Isn't that sweet? Who said history is boring? It depends on the subject and the people involved!

Dicentra is hardy from zones 2 to 9 and grows well in shady locations. It looks great when planted in a woodland setting and is trouble-free if you plant it in moist but well-drained, fertile soil. Dry soil and blistering sun result in poor blooming and a premature early dormancy. This dormancy "turns people off" in growing it, for they expect flowers all the time. Sorry, but enjoy them when they bloom in the spring.

The leaves are dark green, while some varieties have a delightful blue-green coloration.

The common name of the flowers perfectly describes them as heart-shaped "puffy" blossoms. They are usually pink, rose-red, or pure white. The pink and red ones are the most stunning, for they resemble a

broken heart with the bottom showing a large drop of white blood (think of it as blood plasma).

Don't worry—a few varieties offer crimson red drops, giving these flowers a jolt of *NCIS* realism. In some ways, it looks semi-ghastly but is a well-constructed, charming little flower! As you may suspect, this plant has several varieties with many exciting variations.

There are other colorful species available. One, *Dicentra eximia*, or the Fringed Bleeding Heart, is a wildflower native to the eastern parts of the United States. It is long blooming, potentially all summer in shady areas. Its smaller blooms do not have more noticeable heart-shaped characteristics like those of the **Old-Fashioned Bleeding Heart**. The leaves are deeper-cut, like a fern, and last all season.

You can find both species in many garden centers and online nurseries.

Dictamnus – Gas Plant

Dictamnus fraxinella albus; roseus



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A flash in the pan.

Here is a plant with a few other names such as 'Fraxinella,' 'Dittany,' 'Lemon Bush,' and 'Burning Bush.' The names reflect specific characteristics of this plant. It was an old cottage garden favorite but, sadly, is now less known. Times and people change, and no flower remains a constant favorite.

It is a vigorous growing, bushy plant with three-foot-tall spikes of Alstroemeria-like flowers that are white or deep rose pink with deeper veins. The blossoms, stems, and leaves produce a volatile oil (gas)

smelling of a strong lemon or citrus perfume. On warm, still, dark summer evenings when, under specific conditions, the invisible gas surrounding the plant will ignite a flash of blue flame briefly when lit by a match. This flame is more flash than a bang, for it doesn't harm the plant.

A pertinent question is — how did someone discover this ability? According to bizarre historical accounts, gardeners throughout the ages have occasionally witnessed certain aromatic plants sparkle or flash a bluish flame during the night — usually when thunderstorms are nearby. The idea is static electricity ignites the gas. Later versions have some intrigued gardeners using matches to “speed the reaction along.” All these witnesses report the involved plants to release a strong floral perfume or have strong leaf scents.

Trying to trigger a blue flame never worked for me. I do not consider myself desperate for engaging in “botanical pyromania,” so I will not try it again. I am worried the neighbors will call the police to report a shady character roaming around during the night, setting garden plants on fire. No-thank-you. I'll just enjoy that lemony perfume and those beautiful flowers.

This plant provides excellent cut flowers and is very hardy from zones 3 to 9. It is happy to grow in full to partial sunlight and fertile, well-drained soil.

Once planted and root-established, *Dictamnus* resents transplanting, so make sure you know where you permanently want it to grow. Just like Peonies, this plant can live for many years.

Dracunculus – Dragon Arum; Dragon Lily; Voodoo Lily

Dracunculus vulgaris or *Arum dracunculus*



CC0 Photo courtesy of Morguefile.com

The “birds and bees” connection: Part Two.

How can I describe this plant in a gentlemanly and “cultured” way? Since my earlier review of the *Clitoria* vine has female reproductive descriptions, this tuberous perennial has a more-endowed masculine observation. Another common name coined by a famous mail-order nursery (*Plant Delights Nursery*) is **Viagra Lily**. I am not falling into that trap of describing this name. Don’t worry — this plant (and my description) is relatively tame compared to another “he-man” plant embarrassingly discussed later. This is a warning of coming attractions.

Occasionally, you may read, or see on TV, a news-fluff piece about a large tuberous Arum Lily plant, called a **Corpse Flower** (*Amorphophallus titanum*), blooming in a botanical garden greenhouse. Not only is this plant large, weirdly colorful, and looks, ahh... “erect,” it also smells terrible, like a decomposing human body. That’s what people usually describe, for I hope to never encounter a “dear departed” in such a state. Anyway, it always draws people to ogle and giggle — something nobody does when viewing a petunia.

Although being much less in size and girth, the Dragon Lily can grow in your flower bed. Granted, it may not be an attention-grabber, laughter-laced, last news item for the six o’clock Action News show, but it can be a curiosity plant for the entire neighborhood.

Hardy in zones 6 and above, it is native to northern Africa, eastern Mediterranean, and central Middle Eastern locations. Gardeners in lower zones can still plant it in the garden but will need to dig up and store it over the winter before the ground freezes. Container growing is also an excellent option for enjoyment. Treat these tubers like you would for Dahlias.

This perennial grows like *Colocasia* or Elephant Ears, described earlier, from tubers (modified stems that store energy like bulbs) and extend long fan-shaped dark green leaves. These divided leaves have a “somewhat” appearance of a dragon’s claw — thus the common dragon name. These plants are not true lilies, but people always add the lily moniker to tuberous or bulbous flowering plants.

By midsummer, a fleshy, open vase-shaped fusion of petals, called the spathe, emerges. Extending upward from inside it is the spadix, a long, slender, purplish-black flower stalk. Some people call it the dragon's tail. Fortunately, I have found no mention of it being called "something else" of a male dragon. This structure contains both the stamens and pistils, but they usually develop at a different time to prevent self-fertilization.

This inflorescence releases a foul odor — not an immediate neighborhood evacuation order of intensity — but not overly horrible. This odor lasts for a day or two, which attracts flies, the flower's pollinators. Growers advise not to plant this arum near open windows or where you spend your outdoor time. Both the smell and the flies may prove troublesome. Unsuspecting non-gardeners may suspect you have a hygiene problem or your sewer system is clogged-up.

So, where can you plant this smelly dragon? It prefers shady, fertile, and moist (but not boggy) areas. It can tolerate partial sunlight but not constant exposure. Older, well-grown plants can tower to three feet tall but expect smaller-scaled results.

Eryngium – Sea Holly

Eryngium maritimum



Something Elsa of Arendelle may be interested in growing.

If you wish to add some decorative bling to your flower borders, this hardy perennial should suffice. The common name is fitting for having waxy, spiny, thistle-like leaves and naturalized for sandy coastal locations. You don't have to live near the seaside, for these plants will adapt well in rock gardens or borders supplemented with gravel-enhanced garden soil. The leaves are usually silvery-gray, while some varieties have an attractive blue tint.

The flower heads and surrounding bracts also have these shiny appearances, some varieties more so. They look like large ice crystals or

snowflakes.

Hardy from zone 5 and up, Sea Holly is native to sun-soaked coastal beaches of Europe. Clumps of plants can grow to three feet tall and wide and bloom midsummer until fall.

Being exposed to the harsh sun and salt spray, the entire plant adapts to overheating and water loss by secreting a reflective waxy coating. What a strange paradox — naturally growing in hot, sunny locations while looking like ice crystal props in Disney's animated *Frozen* movies.

Years ago, wild plants were common near sand dunes. Today, botanists discover fewer populations because of them being stolen for flower gardens. This does not have to be, for you can quickly grow attractive varieties from seed or purchased nursery plants.

You can also enjoy the flowers for the winter by drying the stems in the fall. Once dry, you can spray them with bright silver (gorgeous!), metallic blue, or gold paint sold in hardware or hobby stores. They make unusual and beautiful Christmas and winter decorations.

Fuchsia – Ladies Eardrops

Fuchsia magellanica 'Riccartonii'



Add a couple diamonds and they will pass as luxuriant earrings.

Have you ever wished those colorful Fuchsia plants, with gorgeous blossoms cascading down from hanging baskets, were hardy? Yes, that would be spectacular. Well, sorry, keep on hoping, but there is at least one species that can survive cold temperatures. The **Riccartonii** variety called the **Hardy Fuchsia** is native to Argentina and, more so, to Chile. It is not cascading but a taller, upright growing type—acting as a semi-woody perennial.

This plant is cold-hardy, easily wintering over in zone 6 if adequately protected, then our very tender common tropical species. Where frosts

are infrequent during the winter, this shrub is deciduous (drops its leaves), but where below-freezing temperatures regularly occur, the tops die back. Mulching helps protect the underground growth-crown and the root system.

Plant this Fuchsia in very fertile, moist, well-drained soil, preferably in an eastern facing location that receives full morning sunlight to partial afternoon shade. Avoid hot, dry, mostly sunny places. I live in a zone 5 growing area and heavily mulch the plants with a few inches of pea-sized gravel. This method provides excellent drainage and ventilation to the growth crown. Planting them near the east and south-side foundation of my house also helps in their survival over a brutal winter.

Under the best growing conditions, this plant can grow to over 10 feet tall and wide. My plants never seem to accomplish this feat—usually to a relatively modest three feet tall and wide. No matter, they bloom abundantly all summer with those gorgeous purple and neon pink blossoms, which attract the hummingbirds.

I do not know why, but most garden centers do not sell this plant. My best guess is, selling the hanging basket Fuchsias is more profitable. Try an Internet search to locate mail-order plants. Raising this Fuchsia in your garden is worth all the trouble of hunting for it.

Gladiolus

*Gladiolus primulinus; callianthus or murielae
or Acidanthera bicolor*



Hail Emperor, those who are about to bloom salute you!

There are many colorful varieties of *Gladiolus* for gardens. You name the color, and there are several varieties. Many have inter-mixed colors.

Trying to determine which ones are unique or unusual is a Herculean feat. I narrowed down three fascinating species or varieties that differentiate themselves from all others based on rarity, color, and, surprisingly, having a fragrance.

My first recommendation is the variety called **Zizanie** (shown above). Its petals are a mind-altering blend of bright red and white. Let's see... think of a Christmas candy cane smashed into pieces, or red and white paint splashed and streaked together. Hey, let's go one step further and say this *Gladiolus* would be worthy as a Cubist masterpiece by Spanish painter Pablo Picasso. You never know what each flower will look like until the petals unfold, displaying many color patterns.



My second recommendation (shown above) is *Gladiolus primulinus* “**Atom**” or “**Atomic**” (first raised in 1946.) The flower spikes’ height is almost half the size of most other *Gladiolus* flowers — averaging nearly three feet tall.

The flowers are more ‘open’ and not clustered or clumped together on the stem. It has brilliantly bright red-orange petals delicately edged with a silvery-white line. When back-lit by the sun, the glowing effect is

incredibly stunning. I feel it is one of the most beautiful 'glads' grown today, but, unfortunately, it is rare.



Another very rare *Gladiolus* sometimes referred to as a different genus is the **Fragrant Glad** or **Abyssinian Lily**. This behind-the-scenes East African species contributes to the “WOW factor” in any garden. It also has the familiar names of Peacock Orchid, and Sword Lily.

Recently, botanists reclassified it as *Gladiolus callianthus* or *Gladiolus murielae*. With all these Latinized botanical names being flung here and there, confusion can reign when people look for this late summer-blooming plant.

More gardeners should grow this outstanding flower. Like our common Glads, it forms long, sturdy, strap-like leaves, all ending in a point. This gives all *Gladiolus* the “Roman Gladiator wielding a sword” associated name.

The flowers, though, are what really stand out in any garden setting. They are orchid-like, with bright white petals highlighted with dark purple throats. Their exceptional quality is to release a lovely lily, gardenia, jasmine, and clove blended perfume into the surrounding air beginning in late summer.

These plants are not actual “evening-bloomers,” for you can enjoy them and the fragrance during the day. Still, the scent intensifies by evening and even more so overnight.

This plant grows, like all other *Gladiolus*, from corms or small bulbs. Cold soil prevents growth, so delay bed or border plantings until late spring — around the same time when planting tomatoes.

You can also plant the corms in large containers earlier in mid-spring to get a running start for earlier bloom. Later, you can move the containers anywhere you spend your mid to late summer evenings. The more corms you plant, the more glorious perfume you will enjoy.

The corms are hardy only in zones 9 to 10. The plants need to grow in full sunlight and well-drained, warm, fertile soil. Try to keep the soil moist — not soggy — to keep the plants healthy. Dig up the corms in late fall in colder locations and store them in a cool, dry area.



For a very rare, expensive, and excessively fragrant hybrid of this species, purchase the **Lucky Star** variety (shown above). This one really is lucky to exist — attempts to hybridize other fragrant *Gladiolus* hybrids have proved futile.

Sometime back in the 1950s, Ms. Joan Wright of New Zealand dabbled in *Gladiolus* hybridization. One specific area of her interest was to cross common Glad varieties with *Gladiolus callianthus Murielae* (reviewed above). She repeatedly crossed various Glads with that species, but they yielded no seeds. Genetics of widely separated species (especially genera) usually produce little or no fertile seeds. But something “miraculous” happened. Either a mutation or the “you are a winner!” gene combinations occurred, and Joan found herself with, at least, one plump, fertile seed.

This new hybrid appears as the Fragrant Glad species (only larger and more fragrant) but has a yellow cast within the petals. It’s lovely! I

believe she must have used a yellow Glad as a parent. Anyway, she dubbed her unique baby as **Lucky Star**. Being sterile, it forms no seed, so the only way to propagate it is by saving and planting its corms.

Since her remarkable discovery, this Glad is possibly one of the rarest garden flowers. You would think, by now, enough corms would be available, but they are not. Few Glad nurseries bother to raise it, and those that do charge plenty for a few corms.

I must admit—this is one of the most expensive plants I have ever purchased. I was so glad (no pun intended) when it bloomed and formed several extra corms.

Well, it's worth blooming in your garden. Grow and admire it, and then, like me, save all the larger corms for future enjoyment. Pass along a few to your gardening friends.

Gloriosa – Flame Lily

Gloriosa superba



Every family has at least one eccentric member.

Less familiar names of this bizarre plant are Flame Lily, Tiger's Claw, Fire Lily, and a few others.

If you never viewed the flowers of this strange plant, you need to grow it. This small vine is an eccentric member of the Lily family and native of East Africa and Asia. It thrives in tropical forests to grasslands as long as the climate is frost-free.

The vines will grow to a little over five feet tall and climb in a remarkable way. The shiny, green leaves have their tips drawn out to a small tendril that will wrap around a small twig or other thin but firm

support. Scattered along the stems are large, lily-like, downward-facing flowers. The other striking features include the stamens, which splay underneath the petals like wooden spokes of a wagon wheel, and the green style and stigma, which do not hang downward but juts out at an odd 90-degree angle. Such a weird construction of floral parts!

The variety called **Rothschildiana** has wavy bright red and yellow petals. Named after Lionel Walter Rothschild, 2nd Baron Rothschild (1868 - 1937), he brought this vine to England from his zoological travels in tropical Africa. Lionel was a son in the wealthy Rothschild banking family of England. When not banking and being a member of Parliament, he would venture off (or hire explorers) to parts unknown to collect birds, insects, animals, and the occasional pretty plant for his personal—and later public—museum. It pays to have wealth!

This vine is hardy to zones 10 and 11 and is an annual everywhere else. It appreciates full to partial sunlight and well-drained, fertile soil. You can plant them in containers, and in the fall, allow the soil to dry. Overwinter the flowerpot in a cool location. Do not dig up or separate the tubers—they are brittle and may break unless carefully handled. Water the pots in early spring, and later fresh shoots will regrow and bloom by midsummer.

Seeds are scarce, and seedlings need years to grow before flowering. Garden centers and nurseries don't sell them, but a few online nurseries offer tubers or potted plants. This vine is very poisonous, so keep it away from all mouths—human and pet.

Gomphocarpus – Family Jewels Milkweed; Balloon Plant

**Gomphocarpus physocarpus; Asclepias
physocarpa**



The “birds and bees” connection: Part Three.

Alright, brace yourself (again) if you feel uncomfortable viewing (and reading) about plants and flowers having references to human sexual attributes. You may have safely by-passed my earlier tense and cringe-worthy sexual-like descriptions of *Clitoria ternatea* (Butterfly Pea) and *Dracunculus vulgaris*. If so, reading this plant’s attributes should undoubtedly raise your eyebrows.

Hey, it's difficult trying to be gentlemanly and an unphased "relax, it's only words" reporter of garden plant characteristics. Oh well, let's bite the bullet and get on with the matter at hand.

Once considered a full-fledged member in the genus of *Asclepias*, botanists now consider this milkweed in a separate classification. They do this all the time with other plants and can become very confusing. For now, both generic names are acceptable. What can be very unacceptable for some gardeners is this plant's provocative common names based on its... ahh... "dangling masculine appendage" appearance. Look at the above photo, and I think you will get the idea.

The typical shaped, white Milkweed blossoms, when pollinated, eventually form these inflated, two or three-inch diameter, pale-green, translucent, balloon-like seed capsules. They also develop soft bristles that resemble coarse hair. This attribute also contributes to this plant having an additional naughty common name of — oh boy, you can probably envision my red-faced embarrassment right now — "hairy balls". Good God, I never thought I would type those combinations of words in my non-fiction ebooks. If I wrote fiction — well, in today's vernacular — anything goes. Why these balloon-things have those decorative bristles is anyone's guess.

While most species of Milkweed hail from North America, this genus calls South Africa it's home. Because of this trans-continental heritage, botanists established a new genus for this and other African milkweeds. This one differs incredibly from our common milkweed species, for it grows to over six-feet tall with many side branches. If you wish a non-controversial nickname, you can call this plant the **Tree Milkweed**. Whew, that's a tame name compared to the others bantered about by giggly, grinning-faced gardeners.

Being from South Africa, this plant is adaptable to dry and less-than fertile soil conditions. For our gardens, having prime, fertile, and regularly moist conditions, it will thrive. The one unfortunate trait of this species is it is only hardy from zones 9 upward. If you live in zone 8

— well, it can squeak by surviving a typical winter if adequately mulched.

The only way to have new plants for each summer in lesser zones is by growing this plant by seed — which is easier to do than our common milkweed species. This one does not need a winter-chill period to induce germination. It is advisable to sow the seeds indoors (preferably under a heating mat) in late winter or early spring.

After the threat of frost, you can plant the seedlings in your flower bed. By all means, plant plenty for like all other species of milkweed, it will attract Monarch butterflies by the droves. Being such a large, sprawling plant, it should produce enough leaves for several larval to eat and grow to maturity.

Helenium – Sneezeweed

Helenium puberulum



Hans Christian Andersen can rest easy.

Have you ever stood in line waiting for your share of something? Ever been last in line and had to accept the “bits and pieces” of what is left?

Once upon a time, members of the immense Daisy Family were greedily grabbing colorful petals to stick on their flower heads. Oxeye daisy loved the white petals while Black-eyed Susan adored the bright yellow and orange ones.

Last in the line for petals was *Helenium puberulum*. When the petal plate finally arrived, all that was available were puny, yellow ones. They were tiny and almost unrecognizable as being petals.

“Sorry,” replied Mother Nature, when Helenium complained of her shortage of petals. *“That’s all for now. You must make the most of what you have.”*

Dejected and embarrassed by what her flower-head looked like, Helenium sulked until one day a bee visited her. *“You have tiny petals, but you have nectar. Offer me some, and I will pollinate you,”* said the bee.

“Oh, thank you, Ms. Bee!” replied Helenium.

Later, a butterfly flew by. “Gee, wiz. You sure have an enormous head but small petals. Oh well, they get in the way sometimes. Got any nectar? If so, I’ll have a sip and pollinate you.”

“I have plenty of nectar. Help yourself, and thank you for helping form my seeds,” replied the grateful Helenium.

Later on, a gardener strolled by and starred at Helenium. “My, what a homely-looking plant you are. A big round head with practically few petals. I will not label you as a real beauty, but you are rather interesting. I enjoy interesting things, so I am going to dig you up and transplant you to my garden.”

“Thanks... I guess,” replied Helenium, not sure if what the gardener said was a compliment.

So, the gardener took Helenium home and found her a prime sunny spot and fertile soil to grow in.

Poor Helenium. All the other flowers in the garden had petals, some excessively so. They laughed at her and teased her unmercifully about her pathetic shortcomings.

“At least the gardener thinks I am something extraordinary, and for that, I am happy and thankful,” she replied to them.

You can learn three lessons from the above story: First, don’t judge a book by its cover. Second, remember Hans Christian Andersen’s story about the ugly duckling. Third, the author of this ebook can’t write half-decent fairy tales.

Native to regions of California, this perennial species is hardy from zone 4 and up. Ignored for a long time, someone eventually thought it would be a great curiosity plant in a garden. Florists also became enamored over this plant for inquisitive additions in floral displays.

The whole plant has naked, silvery-green stems topped by brown flower-heads. They have a base ring or collar of those tiny yellow ray flowers.

To add additional interest in species plants, growers usually add catchy common names. This plant's name is **Autumn Lollipop**. Well, it 'somewhat' describes its appearance, but the bloom-time is way-off. You can expect flowers from midsummer extending to early fall.

Plant this species in as much sunlight as possible and in well-drained, fertile soil. It is easily adaptable to dry conditions but not constant soggy soil. A well-grown clump of flowers can grow over three feet tall.

For our eyes, this plant may not be a contender for "plant-of-the-year" accolades, but the neighborhood pollinator insects will disagree. For them, it is delightful! If they love it — so should we.

You can purchase seed from larger seed companies, especially those that sell wildflower seed. I have yet to locate this plant in garden centers. They offer other more colorful species and varieties, though.

Helianthus – Sunflower

Helianthus annuus; argophyllus



When stardom goes to their heads.

Our favorite star is 93 million miles above our head — give or take a few feet. Here, on our favorite planet, *Helianthus* attempts to stretch to

a tiny fraction of that distance. It shares one stellar quality — the ability to mimic the sun’s brilliance, but to a much lesser extent.

Most commercially available sunflower seeds are of annual varieties. We are all familiar with the large seed-heads of massive, tall plants nodding over by the side of vegetable or flower gardens. Over recent years, interest in wildly colorful sunflowers has gained a “cult following.” With advances in genetics, new, unusual varieties have emerged on the gardening scene.

You can purchase seeds from any seed catalog or garden center. For a tall variety — over 10 feet — grow the impressive **Mongolian Giant** (shown above). This plant will make a powerful impression on anyone with its height and the size of its seeds. I held one seed that measured a fraction over one inch! The whole plant is amazing!

Many other sunflower varieties will grow less lofty and still provide an admirable height. There has been an enormous leap in creating many earth-shade colors — from white, orange, red, garnet-red to an almost black. I can’t describe all the variations of colors on a single flower-head.



For an extra “solar” flare, grow the species/variety called *Helianthus argophyllus* **Gold and Silver**. The major attractions are its several golden-yellow flower-heads and furry, silvery stems and foliage. It is stunning — especially when it shines and sparkles in the sunlight!

Seeds of several varieties — tall and short — are available in many seed catalogs, and to a lesser extent, in garden centers.

Hibiscus

Hibiscus moscheutos



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Frank Sinatra is credited as being “the original heartthrob”.

Every flowering plant family has a few exotic members that flaunt their size, color, and bloom. This group of plants is no exception. Being part of the extensive Mallow family, they are tall-growing perennials or woody, tropical shrubs.

Some varieties have the largest flowers (in diameter) than any other garden perennial.

For our purpose, we will concentrate on the hardy perennials. Do not confuse the colorful tropical and semi-tropical hibiscus shrubs (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*) offered in many garden centers with the following varieties. Those tropical plants are sensitive to cold temperatures and need storing indoors over the winter.

As usual with all *Hibiscus* species, their flowers will only last one or two days (like Daylilies). You may not notice this for many bloom each day. The petals unfurl in their full glory during the day, but by evening fold up and later drop off.

All varieties prefer to grow in full sunlight and fertile, well-drained soil. With all those flowers and foliage, please water these plants during extended dry spells.

I recommend *Hibiscus moscheutos* '**Lord Baltimore**' (shown above) as one towering variety to grow in your garden. If you have the garden space and need something to show-off to your friends, this variety is a must-grow-now plant.

Created by the hybridization of several related species in 1955, this hardy (zones 4 to 9) perennial remains one of the best cultivars to grow in any garden. It rises to eight feet tall (possibly more) and four feet wide on well-established plants. For smaller growing plants, I suggest plopping them into large containers.

The bright, crimson-red, dinner-plate-sized (up to 12 inches in diameter) flowers will cover this 'herbaceous shrub' all summer. Estimates of 300 large flowers may appear on a well-grown plant throughout a typical summer. Someone sure had plenty of spare time to count them!

With all these flowers, you may think there will be plenty of seeds produced by fall. In some varieties, yes, but for this outstanding plant, the flowers are sterile and have no seeds.

Since you are enthusiastic (as I am) to get this plant, where do we purchase it? Your local garden center may have it available but offered

only as potted plants (since it produces no seeds.) If not, several well-known mail order companies always have a supply on-hand.



Another incredible variety is *Hibiscus moscheutos* '**Heartthrob**' (shown above). Introduced in 2012, this zone 4 to 9 perennial has the darkest flowers available for a *Hibiscus* (as of this writing.) The 10-inch diameter flowers are reddish-black, with the unopened, glossy buds being almost-black.

If you are an amateur CSI investigator, the color resembles the grizzly shade of dried or old blood. Can there be a true-black flower? Most botanists feel it may be an elusive color. For this Hibiscus, the flower color is a deep garnet red when back-lit by the sun but is near black when viewed in partial shade or during cloudy weather.

Unlike most other varieties, this plant is more compact, growing to five feet tall and almost as wide. If raised in full to partial sunlight and fertile, moist (but well-drained) soil, the plant will bloom most of the

summer. I made a mistake (yes, I make the occasional major goof-up) by planting this Hibiscus in a hot and dry location. But it has suffered no ill effects.

Growers offer this variety only as potted plants or dormant roots by larger garden centers and mail-order nurseries.

Hymenocallis – Spider Lily or Peruvian Daffodil

Hymenocallis festalis or *Ismene festalis*



Hey, Bill. I see a small clump of these standing still in a breeze.

Spring would not be the same without lawns and gardens having crowds of golden daffodils dancing in a breeze. William Wordsworth saw (rough guess) ten thousand blossoms blooming near a lake and under trees. Viewing a clump of *Narcissus* in your border may not be poetic, but just as uplifting.

Daffodils last but for a few weeks, and then the show is over until next spring. What a bummer. But what can bloom during the summer that

can mimic those blossoms?

Hymenocallis belongs in the impressive Amaryllis family — such as those Christmas gift Amaryllis bulbs. No, they do not bloom as large but have those long, blade-like leaves.

The cluster of blossoms on two to three-foot-tall stalks (technically called an inflorescence) has the familiar daffodil-like shape. The thin outer petals flare outward like spider legs, while the inner delicate membranous petals fuse to form a cup. Viewing these flowers for the first time, they look “almost like” daffodils but have a noticeable but exotic dissimilarity. One feature that makes these plants more enjoyable is their powerfully sweet perfume, exuded primarily in the evening and during the night.

Although most *Narcissus* bulbs are hardy in cold climates, these South American bulbs are hardy only to zone 8 and above. Although all gardeners can plant the bulbs in their gardens, only warmer winter locations can allow them to remain in the ground. All cold climate gardeners need to dig and store these large bulbs over winter. Like your Amaryllis gift plant, you can easily place the bulbs in large containers.

Flower color depends on the species; most have white petals, such as *Ismene festalis* ‘**Zwanenburg**’ (shown above), but others sport eye-catching yellow blossoms, such as **Ismene Sulphur Queen** (shown below.)



These plants (garden and container-grown) prefer partial sunlight and moist, well-drained soil. By late summer, allow the bulbs to endure drier soil to “harden-them-up” by late fall. Container plantings can remain in their pots but withhold water for most of the winter. This is extremely important, for the bulbs will not bloom in the summer without this dry-rest period.

Ipomoea – Morning-glory

Ipomoea nil; Ipomoea muricata



The label on the petals reads “Made in Japan”.

Let’s see...how am I going to explain all the different and obscure Morning-glories without writing several volumes of ebooks? The sheer size of varieties and species (over 500 worldwide) appears to be a favorite creation by flower designer Mother Nature.

Most of the species sport a similar tubular or funnel-like floral structure. For any variation in color and size, there is a representative vine. One standard feature they share in common is they are all tropical plants. Yes, not one hardy floral-soul in the entire group. As long as they experience a warm, moist spot to set down roots, they are happy to

grow as annuals. If you are a plant and have a limited time to live, you better grow fast and bloom furiously to form seeds of as many future generations as possible.

I must point out Morning-glories is a consortium of three species rolled into one. The older Latin names are *Ipomoea purpurea*, *Ipomoea hederacea*, and *Ipomoea nil*. The common Morning-glory has different leaf appearances, but the colorful funnel-shaped flowers look similar.

These species have developed many varieties over the years, with colors confined to the blue-purple, pastel reddish-pink, and white shades. Most of the flowers show a white center, along with a whitish or darker color star pattern in the petals.

So, what should you grow that is so unique to impress your gardening friends? There are many varieties to choose from, but, if possible, get seeds of the unusual **Japanese Morning-glory** types (*Ipomoea nil*). They produce unparalleled distinctive and colorful flowers to amaze you and your friends. For example, a rare variety called **Kikyo Rigel** (shown above and on ebook cover) has fantastic blue and white petals forming a star-shaped pattern. Most Morning-glories do not display this unusual pattern.

By mid-summer, they produce many flowers daily but bloom only in the morning before the sun becomes too intense. If it is a cloudy day, the show may extend until noon. Why do they do this? Why not bloom all day? No one knows for sure, but it may apply to early morning pollinating insects.

But how about evening and overnight blooming flowers? You can always grow the common Moonflower Vine (*Ipomoea alba*), which showcases pure white mega-blossoms from evening until morning. It's nice... but everyone grows it.



There is, however, another evening-bloomer. Botanists classify this plant as a Morning-glory, but it blooms at sunset and all night long until early morning. Its Latin name is *Ipomoea muricata* but has the confusing name of **Lavender Moonflower Vine** (shown above). When blooming, the flowers look like any Morning-glory — except they flower before sunset. When morning arrives, the petals fold up.

One perplexing question arises concerning the flower color. It is pale lavender — not purple or blue — but can quickly become lost in the darkness compared to the Moonflower vine's white-brightness.

Is there any fragrance emanating from these flowers? My nose doesn't detect any smelly molecules. It would be even more outstanding if it did.

To complicate matters, the vines themselves are "strange." They sprout short, semi-hard, white spines all along their length. These spines are pliable and will bend if forced by your fingers. Still, the tips have a

partial sharpness — not painful but noticeable. By the process of evolution, the vine is losing its spiky appearance or gaining the ability to defend itself.

This vine is an enigma and is unusual. It needs to grow in your garden — unfortunately, the large seeds are rare to find. Try an internet search for locating and getting this fascinating vine.

No matter which variety of Morning-glory strikes your fancy, they are all impressive and easy-to-grow vines for any gardener to grow. Their seeds are relatively large (easy enough to handle) but are very hard. They need soaking in water overnight to soften the seed coats for them to germinate. You can sow the seeds in small pots a few weeks before planting them outside (after the last forecasted frost date).

You can also sow the seeds outdoors in a sunny, well-drained area. Don't worry about soil fertility, for too much fertilizer will produce more leaves and stems than flowers. Since they are vines, they will need a supporting structure, like a trellis or fence — or even tall bamboo poles — to wrap their climbing tendrils around.

All morning-glories love the heat of the summer. They prefer warm growing conditions, both in the air and soil temperatures. Gardeners can have difficulties raising the young vines if they grow them in chilly weather and soil.

Your only major problem is in deciding which varieties to grow. Garden centers and nurseries offer them for sale as starter plants before they vine out too much. To get the color or specific variety you wish to grow, sow, and grow them yourself by seed.

Lathyrus – Sweet Pea

Lathyrus belinensis; Lathyrus sativus



Don't wait 3200 years to sow these seeds.

Not all flowers labeled as Sweet Peas are our typical fragrant Sweet Peas (*Lathyrus odorata*.) For example, our vegetable garden sweet peas are in a distinct group (*Pisum sativum*.) They are edible, while flower garden sweet peas are poisonous. There. That's all you need to know — except there are other *Lathyrus* species that demand inclusion in the Sweet Pea club.

There are several species in this genus considered extraordinary. I include two notable species because they have unique colors and histories.

Just when you thought nothing else could surprise you in gardening, this valuable botanical gem called **The Belin Sweet Pea** (shown above) comes along. *Lathyrus belinensis* is a new annual species discovered in Turkey in 1987, but in 2010 it almost became extinct.

Botanists found these peas growing in small patches right beside a highway near the tiny village of Belin, Turkey. Over the years, construction workers destroyed the original group of plants to build a police station. Botanists were able to collect seeds (thank goodness) before any more damage happened. Today, only small populations of wild plants survive.

Classified as a Sweet Pea, it stands out from our common varieties in more ways than one. First is the color of the blossoms; they are bright yellow with red veins. Stunning! There are no actual yellow sweet peas anywhere!

The second reason is its light fragrance. It is not your typical sweet pea perfume but... drum roll please... a startling aroma of tulips. The flowers are smaller than regular sweet peas and fewer of them on the two-foot-tall bushy-vines.

These gorgeous flowers almost became lost, and through the saving of seeds, this new species is gaining ground in our gardens. It is still rare but should become more well-known. Geneticists are striving to breed this pea with our ordinary sweet peas. The goal is to add a bright yellow color to them. Currently—no luck—but gene-splicing offers more hope in incorporating this elusive color.



Our common fragrant Sweet Pea varieties gain all the accolades of prestige and honor to grace our gardens. Another humble little pea has made a significant name for itself. This plant has a few other names, such as Blue Grass Pea and Indian Pea, but it's best known as the legendary **King Tut Pea** (*Lathyrus sativus*), shown above.

Gather around everyone for you are about to learn about this mysterious plant. As the legend begins, the famed English archaeologist and Egyptologist Howard Carter discovered Egyptian pharaoh Tutankhamun's tomb, nicknamed "King Tut," on November 4, 1922. He and his assistants found seeds of this plant while rummaging around Master Tut's personal burial belongings (poor kid). They spirited them and other valuable 'golden goodies' back home to England at the country estate of Lord Carnarvon, who financed Howard's excavations.

When sown into the estate garden soil, the seeds germinated, grew, and bloomed. It amazed people that these seeds could germinate and thrive

after 3200 years. Gardeners, on learning of this discovery, wanted seeds from these unique royal plants.

To distinguish them from all other species or varieties, they became known as the King Tut Pea. The ancient Egyptians supplied their deceased rulers with the parting gifts on their journey to the afterlife. They had left food items, like these peas, as a quick, high-energy snack for this teenage pharaoh.

Historians and botanists doubt if this pea-story is true. One reason is 3200-year-old seeds would not survive so long in a tomb. A more plausible story is that *Lathyrus sativus* grows wild in that area and throughout the Middle East, Northern and Eastern Africa, and Asia. Someone sent Lord Carnarvon fresh seeds (or he collected himself) and grew some in his extensive estate gardens.

You can believe this story or not, but what is true is this pea having gorgeous sky-blue to purple blossoms. With a few stripes of pink (like marbling), it creates a greater eye-appeal. Unlike the climbing and fragrant nature of the Sweet Pea, this unscented species forms a few climbing tendrils but prefers to sprawl on the ground.

It's worth it to grow this pea in your garden, not only for the wild story but all those gorgeous colorful blossoms.

Although the seeds are edible in small quantities, they are poisonous if consumed in large amounts over extended periods. Just stick to eating your green garden peas instead, and enjoy the beauty of this pea, the Belin Sweet Pea, and our fragrant ordinary Sweet Peas for the flower garden.

Lilium – Lily

Lilium orientalis



The oldies-but-goodies are still impressive.

No garden is complete without the beauty, grace, and wonder of a lily. We are all accustomed to the traditional Easter Lily. Still, there is a vast world of other lilies rich in color and fragrance you will love to have in your garden. I recommend you should plant the following species and varieties. Don't delay in enjoying the large, colorful, and aromatic blossoms. Most can grow "fairly tall," but some will tower above our heads when grown in optimal conditions.

Growers classify one group as Oriental Lilies, which will grow over five feet tall — many up to eight feet or more! They bloom by midsummer

and continue flaunting their stunning petals by fall. Like most garden lilies, they prefer to grow in full to part sun and fertile, well-drained soil. If the garden experiences windy conditions, tie the stems to a support pole to prevent breakage. It's worth the trouble to perform this action.

Lilium orientalis **Stargazer Lily** (shown above) is the variety most recognizable for garden lilies — maybe not in name but in size, color, and fragrance of the flowers. It also helps in being a favorite flower for florists. So, why do I include it here if it is so popular? The answer is because it needs to be in your garden if it isn't there already. It is an oldie-but-goodie variety still grown by nurseries today.

Historically, this lily is a significant genetic contributor in creating many other lily bulbs sold today. Predecessors of this lily (based on wild species heritage) had their large flowers hang downward. They were pretty, but they hid their genuine beauty unless you crawled underneath on your back to view them. That is a rather undignified (and dirty) position for any gardener to experience.

In 1974, California lily breeder Leslie Woodriff created an upward-facing lily, which he named 'Stargazer.' What a glorious name for this stunning plant! From this lily, newer varieties appeared with other colors, all having that critical trait of having the large blossoms face outward (and upward) for easy viewing.

Nurseries sometimes overlook offering Stargazer (compared to all the other Lilies) to the public. It is like beloved, older Hollywood actors being replaced by newer, high-profile (and box office profitable) actors.



Developed in the early 2000s, double-flowered Oriental lilies (known as Rose-Lilies) took the gardening world by storm. For example, the variety called **'Thalita' Double Flowered Oriental Lily** (shown above) resembles 'Stargazer' but with multiple petals. As of this writing, it may be a mutation of 'Stargazer' or a unique look-alike. No matter, for it has beautiful colors and a high-octane perfume.



Another variety to be raised in every garden is called **Conca de' Or**, shown above.

The first time I saw this lily, it was over my head. I had to look up, and there were all those gorgeous eight to nine inches in diameter blossoms looking down at me. One added benefit to having lilies at this level is the fragrance is closer to your nose, without having to stoop over.

This lily has enormous — and I mean massive — blossoms! They are white with an interior of bright lemon yellow. The stamens have a brick-red color.

Growers classify this lily as an Oriental/Trumpet hybrid (called **Orienpet Lilies**). They can reach as tall as eight feet after growing for at least three years. It is hardy from zones 4 to 9.

Lonicera – Winter Honeysuckle

Lonicera fragrantissima



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A weird but heart-warming harbinger of spring.

Not all Honeysuckle plants are vines. Some, including this unique species, are woody shrubs. What makes this plant unique is it begins blooming in the late winter. Oh, come on! No way! Yes, it's true.

This plant blooms starting late February (in the Northern Hemisphere) while snow is covering the ground. You must think I am out of my mind (yes, true, but I am a gardener after all) stating that a honeysuckle blooms in the late winter. You will be a believer after you grow this excellent shrub!

The long stems produce many clusters of small but beautiful white or translucent flowers. They release a refreshingly strong lemon or lily perfume into the frigid air. It always surprises me since I cannot figure out where that lemon fragrance is coming from until I finally realize this plant is blooming. To add to the enjoyment is it continues to flower until mid-spring.

Hardy from zones 4 to 9, it grows to over six feet tall, but pruning after flowering makes it a more compact bush. Landscapers don't recommend it for small gardens, but it is ideal for isolated plantings, even as a hedge. Prune to any desirable size, but after pruning, leave it alone for the flower buds to form on the new growth during the summer and early fall.

It would appreciate growing in as much sunlight and well-drained soil.

I must state its growth habit is weird after planting. The main shoots grow horizontally near the ground when they are young. But after the following year, the new shoots grow upright. Confused? Grow this shrub, and you will eventually understand. Rest assured, it is natural for this species to develop this way when young.

Winter Honeysuckle is very rare to find in garden centers. My best advice is to search online nurseries for availability.

Lycoris – Naked Ladies

Lycoris squamigera



You can always charge admission to your garden.

Calm down. It's not what you think. However, you can have fun with your friends by saying, "Come on over to see the naked ladies in my garden!" Won't they be surprised!

This nickname is one of the several common names for this bulb. The other names are Surprise Lily, Magic Lily, and Resurrection Lily. Growers give them these nicknames because the flower stalks grow out of the ground in late summer before the leaves develop. Yes, you read that correctly; they bloom — in late summer — before the leaves emerge.

It may surprise you to see them blooming since the stems blend in well with other plants. The bulbs bloom for nearly three weeks. After that, they form seeds, then die back to the ground. Here today — gone tomorrow. About a week or two later, the leaves will emerge and grow. They stay this way over the fall and winter.

By late spring, they die back, and the bulbs go dormant until late-summer. Then the cycle begins again. These plants must be from an alternate universe!

The bulbs are hardy from zones 4 to 11 and love to grow in full to partial sunlight and in well-drained soil.

It is important not to disturb these bulbs. Plant and forget about them except for the occasional fertilizing and watering when they are growing. Whatever you do — don't dig them up or transplant them!

Meconopsis – Himalayan Blue Poppy

Meconopsis betonicifolia, or Meconopsis baileyi



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Climbing Mount Everest would be less challenging.

I am now channeling Rod Serling for this plant's introduction. We will now cross over into *The Twilight Zone* of gardening.

There are some plants that even old gardening pros (alas, like me) have difficulty in growing. We can list many plants we think we can easily grow but prove otherwise. Orchids shudder at the thought of me becoming enamored by their beauty and wish to raise them. They don't last long. Long live all gorgeous orchids — the ones out of my hands, that is.

My other unfortunate victim is the enticing, additive, and alluring perennial-temptress called *Meconopsis* or **Himalayan Blue Poppy**. This plant is temperamental in its requirements for successful raising in most gardens. Likewise, I get temperamental each time I get the determination to raise hundreds — oh, let's be realistic and say at least one plant — in my garden. All I ultimately raise is my temper and mutter, "oh, to hell with them!" and then grow a few Marigolds just to prove I still have the green-thumb talent of growing flowers.

One rare spring, I successfully germinated a few seeds, and they, to my surprise and joy, grew. Later, at a transplantable size, I carefully set them out in a cool, moist, shady garden area. And this is where the sapphire petal anticipation ends — they eventually died. Each spring afterward, I tried to grow these flowers, but to no avail. Oh well, maybe I will try again. Perhaps you will have better luck. I hope so!

To help you on your quest for Blue Poppy enlightenment, you need to play by the rules of successful nurturing. Without going into a play-by-play account on what-we-think are "the best" methods of *Meconopsis* culture, I'll present to you a condensed version of bullet-point facts. I have no idea if these are the tried-and-true ways for successful cultivation, for I have never succeeded. For me, this is all theory. So, here it goes:

- Try to grow your plants from fresh seeds. Don't even try to germinate them from a 2011 seed packet. Shoot, they may not germinate well from last year's seed packet, but you will have a better chance of success. Seed germination may take up to six weeks. The process of cold soil stratification may increase germination rates and time.
- If you are fortunate to have young seedlings and grow them to transplantable size (like any other perennial), or obtain plants from a nursery, plant them in a partly shady location with moist but well-drained, highly fertile soil. The application of well-rotted mulch is beneficial. They cannot tolerate full sun and hot ground. Think cool. These plants like to grow in cool, moist conditions. If your garden can

grow spring blooming primroses, these plants should grow well for you.

- Growers advise spring planting instead of fall planting so your plants can develop a robust root system before winter.
- *Meconopsis* can act as a biennial or a perennial (hardy to zones 4 to 7), so patience is vital when to expect flowering — which happens in late spring.
- Please understand that, although named as a poppy, it isn't one. Don't grow them as you would an Oriental Poppy (*Papaver orientalis*).
- Cross your fingers, hope, and pray your plants will bloom. But expect they may perish.
- Have Plan B on standby: Sow Marigold seeds instead.

I have probably scared you from attempting to grow these elusive plants. There is some hope of obtaining a slightly less-demanding strain. Nurseries are now selling a type called *Meconopsis* “**Lingholm.**” Growers report it to be more reliable in blooming and hardy to warmer locations.

Hold your horses if you wish to gallop to your nearest garden center, for they may not sell this strain. Some online nurseries may offer it. You can also buy seeds, but germination is, unfortunately, unreliable. Well, let's try it.

Maybe, if the solar system planets' alignments and Mother Nature's mood are favorable, we can enjoy those Honolulu-blue petals. Hope springs eternal, but these plants will weaken that great expectation.

Mirabilis – Angel’s Trumpet Four O’Clock

Mirabilis longiflora



When becoming an angel, you’ve earned the right to toot your own horn.

These plants’ Latin name means “marvelous,” referring to their floral beauty. That word describes why they should grow in your flower bed. Maybe more detailed information about these plants wouldn’t hurt.

The other name for these flowers is “Marvel of Peru,” for they originate in this region of South America. An old-fashion fragrance garden would not be complete without these delightful, colorful, and wonderfully

scented flowers. Do they bloom at 4 O'clock? If they get sunny conditions, they wait until the evening to bloom, but if grown in more partly shaded areas, they can bloom late in the afternoon. One thing is for sure—don't set your watch by them!

One rare species is *Mirabilis longiflora*, native to the southwestern United States and northern Mexico. Each plant can grow to almost two feet tall and is bushy with hundreds of four to six-inch-long, tubular, white flowers. The blossoms bloom all summer and into the fall, releasing a beautiful, sweet jasmine-like perfume into the evening air. Enjoying your garden in warm summer evenings with this scent is a match made in heaven.

It can be a perennial in zones 8 to 10 if protected from frozen or soggy winter soil. Each plant can re-grow from the thick, woody taproot or tuber. You can dig these up before winter and store them in damp peat moss over the winter. Replant them in the spring after the last frost, or get a head start by allowing them to begin their new growth in containers safely inside your house. By summer, they will be larger with thousands of blossoms.

You can find seeds viewing online nurseries or in catalogs specializing in rare seeds.

Oenothera – Evening Primrose

Oenothera glazioviana



Police report strange goings-on in one neighborhood garden. Film at 11.

Evening Primroses are not related to the true springtime flowering Primroses. Why named for them is anyone's guess, for the blossoms don't look like primroses. No matter, it's another example of amateur botanical misidentification.

Native throughout North America, *Oenothera* has an affinity to grow in disturbed ground — such as abandoned fields, roadsides, drainage ditches, vacant lots, and other less than ideal locations. In fertile garden soil, it will grow and bloom exceptionally well.

These plants produce many bright yellow, four-petal scented flowers on six-foot-tall-plus branching stalks from early to late summer. Each blossom lasts one or two nights, but more follow each succeeding evening. Although not a contender in “best in show” of garden plants, a stalk of spent flowers loses its attractive appeal. Still, the individual blossoms are lovely.

Some *Oenothera* species bloom only during the day, while others wait until the evening and overnight. It is these night bloomers that have a sweet perfume, enjoyable for all us night critters. You can enjoy the sight of these flowers with the help of a flashlight (or torch) while perusing your garden. Your neighbors may become startled (if not panicky), but they and the subsequent arrival of police officers will eventually understand that we gardeners are peculiar people.

Forget about watching television show reruns during summer evenings, for the best show to watch is here in your garden. The star of “The Evening Primrose Show” belongs to **Tina James’s Magical Evening Primrose** (*Oenothera glazioviana*), shown above.

Years ago, garden writer Tina James popularized this very delightful plant. According to rumor, she hosted Evening Primrose parties showcasing its beautiful flowers.

In the evening, the large, yellow blossoms slowly open (like in time-lapse photography) right before your eyes. I watched the flowers open at 8:30 pm, and ten minutes later, they were fully open. No fooling! The blossoms exude a bedazzling lemon, lily and honeysuckle blended perfume.

When I owned and operated my mail-order flower nursery, I received an email from a customer, “Gail in Arkansas,” who wrote about her unusual experience with this plant. Here is what she wrote:

“I ordered several things from you in the spring of 2001, one of them being the plant mentioned above. This past summer, it was the hit of my garden. Even non-gardeners would come and gather around the plant to watch its magical openings. I’m sure that many people who drove by were

thinking we were performing some sort of black magic ritual gathered around this plant every evening at the same time. Blooming here in my NW Arkansas garden would begin at approximately 8:50 pm, and the show would last until around 9:10 pm. This summer, it was three feet high and the highest flower count for one evening show was 67 blooms."

Each plant grows to four feet tall with hundreds of flowers over the summer, so plan a rowdy garden party each evening. Your neighbors won't mind, will they? They may think you are crazy (hardcore gardeners usually are) staring at these plants each evening. You may invite the previously mentioned police officers to the party if the excitement becomes too intense. Hey, more the merrier!

Seeds are scarce to locate, but they are "out there — somewhere," so your best bet is to use an internet search. Garden centers may not offer potted plants, but seeds may be available in wildflower catalogs.

Please note, this plant is a biennial — growing the first year, then blooms the next. It self-seeds, but sow their seeds each spring to establish flowering plants for next year's summer displays.

All these plants grow well in sunlight to part shade and fertile, well-drained soil. Most species are hardy from zones 4 to 9.

Passiflora – Passion Vine; Passion Flower or Maypop

Passiflora incarnata; *caerulea*



A crucifixion and an aphrodisiac all in the same flower description. Go figure!

If you had to vote on the world's most unusually constructed flower, this would be number one. Most of these plants are tender, tropical vines, but a few, called Maypops, are hardy and can survive winter conditions. As the nickname implies, they begin to bloom in late spring.

These vines use coiled tendrils to grab hold of adjacent shrubs and other supporting structures, to lift themselves to heights of eight to 12

feet and more.

The common name of 'Passion Vine' results from two diametrically opposed ideas. One notion is that eating its succulent egg-sized fruit gives you romantic tendencies. At the same time, the other, more acceptable idea concerns the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Many South American people call it by the legendary name of "Flower of The Five Wounds." By historical accounts, sometime around 1609, Spanish missionaries wrote about a beautiful flower growing in the South American rainforests that represented Christ's Passion before and during his crucifixion.

We have to have a vivid imagination on what the flower parts represent:

- Ten sepals and petals of the flower represent the ten apostles who witnessed the crucifixion of Christ.
- The corona or a ring of wavy filaments represents the crown of thorns.
- The five stamens are symbolic of the five wounds, while the three stigmas represent the three-head nails.
- For extra dramatic flair, the palmate leaves and the many wavy tendrils represent the hands and whips of His Roman persecutors.
- Like Jesus, the flowers remain alive (well, in full open bloom) for only a day.

With hundreds of species, hybrids, and varieties available for the home gardener, the flowers' size and color are limitless. While most of the species grow in the subtropical and tropical areas of North and South America, all can grow in colder zones if raised in containers.

If you need a hardy variety, try *Passiflora caerulea*, commonly called the **Blue Passion Vine** (shown above). Four-inch diameter flowers with beautiful white petals ringed with blue to purple filaments appear all summer. They also have a lovely sweet perfume.

This species is also one of the most commonly found types available in many nurseries. Its twining vines can grow to well over 15 feet if uncontrolled. By the fall (in warmer locations), egg-size, deep orange fruits become ripe, then you can pick and squeeze them to produce 'Passion-fruit' juice.

Evergreen in tropical climates, this species is deciduous (drops its leaves) where winters are cold. Its hardiness is from zones 6 to 10. Northern gardeners in zones 5 can winter over this species only with excellent protection against severe cold weather. Lower zone gardeners will need to grow this vine in containers and hold overwinter in a basement or heated garage.

All Passion Vines make excellent container subjects. If you have a bright window, it can bloom indoors during the winter.

Petunia

**Petunia axillaris, integrifolia, exserta,
grandiflora**



Smoking is dangerous to your physical health. Growing Petunias is beneficial to your mental health.

There are over 20 species of *Petunia* growing in South America. That may not sound a lot, but this genus took the world by storm when first discovered. The storm still rages. Go to your nearest garden center and see the recent results.

Petunias surprise many gardeners, for they belong in the nightshade family, such as tomatoes, where their closest cousin is *Nicotiana* (Tobacco). Botanists thought of them as miniature tobacco plants with

huge flowers. They became overlooked since big-leaf tobacco was the prime focus not for garden enjoyment but for habit-forming smoking. It wasn't until later when botanists thought they looked "pretty" and may be valuable for unusual flower garden displays.

One species, *Petunia axillaris* (shown above), first discovered in 1823 by a French botanist named Petun (honored with this plant's Latin name), is native to Argentina. This is a day-blooming annual but provides bright-as-a-headlight white flowers wafting an alluring jasmine-like fragrance for your evening enjoyment. It is one of the original parent plants used to create all the hundreds (well, let's say millions to be on the safe side) of petunia varieties for our gardens.

Petunias were popular — for a while — until interest waned. Other newly discovered flowers became the highlight to include in beds and borders. It was not until the late 1800s and early 1900s did they exhibit a resurgence in popularity. Botanists discovered other species, which allowed for the development of hybrid variations.

In the category of "*And now for something completely different...*" (from *Monty Python's Flying Circus*), one breeder, Theodosia Burr Shepherd of Ventura, California (coined "The Flower Wizard of California"), developed during the 1880s an enormous variety called **Giants of California**. The average extravagantly-colored blossom measured almost seven inches in diameter! The petals were wavy and extended backward, exposing a vast network of contrasting colorful veins.

For several decades, this petunia was all the rage among gardeners. They competed to raise the largest and most colorful flowers. Today, seeds are scarce to find. Imitations are sometimes available but are not "the real McCoy." It is possible this old variety no longer exists.

Later, smaller but more floriferous modern hybrids became popular. Instead of impressive individual blossoms like the California Giants, the public turned to admire and grow plenty of smaller, same-color, bedding-style varieties.

Colorful varieties bred from these and other species continue to enchant and tease us into growing them in our gardens. It was once thought impossible to accomplish, but new hybrids now flaunt most colors of the rainbow. There are shades of ‘almost green’, ‘almost-black’, ‘almost blue’, spotted-dotted colors (via a wild genetic disorder called “*jumping genes*”), and really mixed-up — or messed-up in some people’s minds — double petal varieties.

Of all the rainbow colors, yellow is problematic; breeders can’t develop an honest-to-goodness bright yellow variety. There are “soft-yellow” types available, but no daffodil or dandelion-yellow ones. That doesn’t stop seed catalogs from selling yellow varieties. Some companies employ the wonder of *Adobe Photoshop* to make a deep yellow petunia —and other vividly beautiful flowers for their catalog photos.



You may think nothing is new in petunia gardening, but in 1987, word spread throughout the world of the discovery of a new species. In 2007,

explorers traveled to southern Brazil and found only fourteen *Petunia exserta* plants (shown above) in existence.

This very rare species has bright red, star-shaped flowers highlighted with yellow pollen-laden anthers. Unlike most (or almost) all other petunias, hummingbirds pollinate this one. Bees and butterflies usually pollinate the other species.

Seeds collected from these wild plants are now available for you to grow in your garden. This is ironic, for the wild plants are slowly disappearing in their native environment—not from human exploitation, but from natural causes. This species is gradually interbreeding with other petunia species and will phase itself out of existence. Mother Nature is allowing this one to commit species suicide!



Another Argentinian species, *Petunia integrifolia* (formerly *Petunia violacea*) (shown above), has different looking blossoms. This one has beautiful, purplish-pink flowers with deep lavender-blue throats. They

are smaller and “stubbier” than our typical-constructed petunia flowers. The plants are also less bushy and spread more along the ground.

Grow all these petunias in plenty of sunlight and fertile soil. They make excellent container subjects to place anywhere you want to enjoy the perfume. Breeders finally recognize that Petunias have a fragrance and make strides to create new varieties, having brilliant color and distinctive scent — even during the day.

You can get seeds of all these species from larger seed companies.

Rhodochiton – Purple Bell Vine

Rhodochiton atrosanguineus



For a moment there, I was worried my eyes suddenly developed astigmatism.

I am always amazed at the unusual—well, let's be honest and say strange-looking tropical flowers. This vine is of no exception.

The two-inch-long blossoms have a Salvador Dali painting-like appearance; they appear to be bells, but distorted or elongated. I know, confusing, but use your imagination. The deep pink to reddish-purple sepals display a “peeled back” bell shape, but with an elongated petal clapper. These petals are dark purple or nearly black and flare outward (like a knob) to expose the stamens and pistils.

Native to Mexico, in 1836, explorers first saw this vine’s dangling blossoms, and it was love at first sight. Although hardy to zone 10, this vine grows well from seed and blooms over the summer. The heart-shaped leaves and thread-like tendrils coil around any structure.

A towering height of 10 feet plus is not uncommon when grown in partly sunny locations. The plants will grow well in containers but will scale to a smaller height. The blossoms will also look great when planted in a hanging basket.

Like all vines, fertile, well-drained soil is necessary for maximum blooming. Frost will kill this plant, so raise it as an annual. If grown in a container, try to save and care for the vine indoors during the winter. It may not bloom but expect massive re-growth and abundant flowers the following summer.

Rosa – Roses

Rosa hybrida



Roses always attend the best-dressed party — even when not invited.

With such an enormous number of species and hybrid varieties discovered and bred over the ages, it is difficult to reach a consensus of what constitutes those being unusual or unique. There are too many characteristics to consider, such as petal colors and flower size.

One area of attention in determining if some roses are unique is by specifying their age. We now consider several older shrub roses being living antiques or heirloom roses. These older roses are great, but few nurseries offer them to the public.

Roses bred today attract our immediate attention for planting in gardens. Two hybrid tea varieties, out of practically hundreds (thousands?) available to choose from, “caught my eye” while touring garden centers and public gardens.

My first recommended must-grow rose is a delightful, moderately fragrant variety called **Ketchup and Mustard™** (shown above). The underside of this double-petaled rose is bright yellow, while the top is fire-engine red. I know other roses display similar bi-colors, but this one really stands out.

The second hybrid tea rose that screams “look at me!” is **Ink Spots** (shown below.)



This is one of the “almost black” roses available (as of this writing.) The color is actually deep velvety garnet red, which it displays when the petals spiral open, but the buds appear black.

As for fragrance, not much, but we'll overlook this discrepancy since we cannot take our eyes off those Gothic-like petals.

Suppose Hybrid Tea roses are "not-your-cup-of-tea" for steeping in your garden. In that case, I recommend growing the bushier shrub roses. Unlike older, antique roses, which may prove too large to grow in smaller suburban gardens, newer shrub roses are more manageable to accommodate.

Most shrub roses are outstandingly beautiful, healthy, and long-blooming. I saw several of them in a public garden and became awed by their beauty. Most are hardy from zone 5 (possibly 4) and up.

You can find the more unusual varieties via online searches of rose growers. Larger garden centers usually avoid the "wild 'n wooly" varieties.

Rudbeckia – Western Coneflower

Rudbeckia occidentalis



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Exhibitionism is also a “look-at-me” activity.

Most flowers are narcissists; they flaunt themselves with colorful petals and fragrances. Most seem to shout, “Look at me!” They are gaudy showoffs for attracting pollinating insects and our immediate attention.

Then, there are the introverts. They blend into the background and seem to be content being less showy. If pollinated, then all is well. Some plants take this blandness to the extreme by eliminating most or all petals. I am not sure if Mother Nature approves of this naked redesign, but flower breeders thrive on unusual variations.

For this wildflower, Mama Nature took an evolutionary chance by eliminating all the petal-like ray flowers which surround the base of the fertile, cone-structure flowers.

This gamble paid off, for it thrives in the northwestern regions of the United States and extends farther eastward into the interior western states. A sun-loving perennial, it is super hardy from zones 3 to 9.

A selection of this species is **Black Beauty**. Reliably growing to about three feet, the only resemblance of a flower is its green sepals surrounding the dark brown/black cone. Here reside small, fertile, non-showy true-flowers. Really, the only resemblance of “showiness” is the bright yellow rings of pollen that surrounds the cone. The last act is for a bee or butterfly to perform the service of cross-pollination to ensure seeds of a new generation.

Blooming begins from early summer and dwindles until early fall.

Salpiglossis – Painted Tongue

Salpiglossis sinuata



This is what happens when a petunia goes stark raving mad — with color.

What do you get when you cross a daylily and a petunia with a Fabergé Easter egg and a Tiffany lamp? The answer is something with a massive depreciation of value. But, if you guess this outstanding flower, you are also correct. This out-of-the-ordinary annual garden plant provides masses of petunia-like, flamboyant, outlandish, and exceptional colorful flowers.

Introduced from regions of the southern Chilean Andes mountain range in 1824, this magnificent plant took the gardening world first by

disbelief, then surprise, and finally with wide-eyed wonder. It still amazes non-gardeners who first encounter its stunning beauty. You may have deduced by now that I love this flower — and you are correct.

Some varieties may be of one color, while others have contrasting colors or overlaid with geometric patterns and veins. Some named types (the best ones) are wickedly gorgeous, appearing like stained glass etched or overlay with shining gold.

One complaint I have with *Salpiglossis* (not of its making) is the horrible nickname given to it. Painted Tongue sounds like a medical complication. I keep thinking of a doctor telling a patient to say “ahh” while examining inside his mouth. “Oh, my goodness! You have a serious case of Painted Tongue,” says the doctor. “You will need to flush your mouth each hour with mouthwash.” No, this lovely plant needs a great (and healthy) common name such as ‘stained glass flower’ or ‘kaleidoscope blossom.’ You can name it better than I.

These plants grow to over two feet tall in full sun to partial shade (especially in hot regions.) Having a mountainous heritage, they prefer growing in cooler conditions. Warm temperatures and high humidity will limit their full blooming potential for most of the summer. If planted in a bed, border, or container, make sure the plants grow in fertile and well-drained soil.

Like petunias, if the plants get too tall and ‘gnarly,’ trim them back, and they will re-bloom in two weeks.

In all my gardening years, I have never found this plant offered for sale in garden centers. I suppose more emphasis is on petunias since they are more well-known.

Seeds are available in many seed catalogs, but my advice is not to purchase the “mixed-seed” option; flower-color from mixes can be disappointing. Always buy named-varieties such as **Kew Blue**, with vivid dark blue to black petals, **Red Bicolor**, or **Royale Purple Bicolor** (shown above) with outstanding colorful petals.

Saponaria – Soapwort; Bouncing Bet

Saponaria officinalis



You can have the cleanest garden in the neighborhood!

What a strange name for a plant! This European wildflower has a muddled history as far back to Medieval days or even earlier. It is a beautiful perennial related to the Dianthus or carnation family, blooming from mid to late summer until a killing frost.

Clustered together, the single or double flowers are rosy pink or snow white. They have an incredible grape soda or Concord grape perfume.

Another fascinating feature is the leaves form soapsuds when you crush and rub them with your hands in water. The Latin name of 'saponaria' means 'relating to soap' or 'soap making.' Museums did (and some still

do) use the leaves to produce soap suds for washing delicate or irreplaceable fabric material. If you need a quick hand-wash, pluck a few leaves, crunch them up, add a little water, and presto—instant hand soap.

The plants slowly spread and grow to over two feet tall, thriving in total sunshine to partial shade and fertile, well-drained soil. They are exceptionally hardy from zones 3 to 9.

Saponaria still keeps its wildflower heritage by being invasive but not too aggressive. A sharp spade's downward thrust can control out-of-bounds plants. Yes, that sounds horrible, but sometimes we have to practice 'tough love' on some overactive plants.

It tolerates dry soil conditions and has few insects or disease problems. No wonder, for the bugs don't want soap in their little mouths!

A recommended variety, *Saponaria officinalis alba plena* (which is the species only dressed-up), has double-petaled white flowers. It cannot form seeds, so you have to propagate it by cuttings. The magnified grape fragrance is because of the extra set of petals. It is rare to find. Overall, it is a plant worth finding, growing, and enjoying!

Silphium – Compass Plant or Rosinweed

Silphium laciniatum



Who needs roadmaps and GPS, anyway?

This impressive perennial is native to the vast prairie land of North America. The coarse-textured, six to nine-foot-tall stems and bright yellow, daisy-like flowers resemble sunflowers but are not related directly to them.

The common name refers to how they orient their lowermost leaves. They position themselves vertically to a north-south axis alignment. By seeing their arrangement, the pioneers could get their approximate navigational bearings.

Why on earth does it do this? Botanists theorize that it orients its leaves to avoid constant exposure to the harsh prairie sunlight during the afternoon. Aligning to a north-south position prevents excessive water loss from the leaves by showing less surface area to direct sunlight.

The other common name of rosinweed refers to the Plains Indians splitting the stalks and extracting its sticky sap (called resin). When the resin began to dry, they would start chewing it like bubblegum.

This plant is hardy from zones 3 to 8 and enjoys as much sunlight as possible. You do not have to worry about regular watering because it tolerates drier soil. Just make sure the soil is well-drained, for constant wet soil will kill the root system. If growing in ideal conditions, it can (possibly) live longer than you — hopefully for a very long time!

Blooming occurs during the summer, and each plant can produce masses of flowers. Place these giant plants in the rear of your border so as not to shade or overtake your other flowers.

On a sad note, this plant once grew in abundance with the tall prairie grasses before the plow appeared. Today, conservationists try desperately to protect some wild prairie areas.

The great American conservationist, environmentalist, and author Aldo Leopold wrote in his book, *A Sand County Almanac*, about the loss of the prairie fauna and flora. One passage describes him finding a solitary Compass Plant growing in an old, tall grass-covered cemetery. For him, it was ironic that one of the last few remaining wild-stock plants grew in such small protected areas, even there in a neglected cemetery. He wrote, in part:

“What a thousand acres of Silphiums looked like when they tickled the bellies of the buffalo is a question never again to be answered, and perhaps not even asked.”

You will not find this plant offered for sale in any garden center. You may discover plants in wildflower nurseries or in wildflower seed catalogs. Let’s cross our fingers that we can find and grow this fantastic plant in our flower gardens.

Spilanthes – Toothache Plant; Peek-a-Boo Plant; Eyeball Plant

Spilanthes oleracea



I almost became a recipient of the Darwin Award.

Just in case you must wait a month to visit your dentist involving a toothache, this annual plant may ease your pain. Within the category of “Will wonders never cease?” comes this highly unusual flowering plant. Yes, it can help temporarily relieve a toothache or sore gums.

I am a bonafide skeptic. Before I nibbled its leaves and flower heads, my first impression was its Novocain-like power of pain relief was

nonsense. Well, I was eventually proved wrong in the most frightening way.

Just nibbling on a small leaf produced a “tingling” sensation, followed soon after by a slight numbness of my lips and tongue. What, I wondered, would happen if I were to chew a few more leaves along with some flowers? I found out — almost having a panic attack for being so reckless — my mouth became totally numb. I could not talk well and worried my throat would swell and prevent me from breathing. Oh yeah, thoughts like that can help avoid a panic attack. Not!

Thoughts of calling 9-1-1 and explaining my predicament were potentially problematic. Try talking after a few injections with Novocain. Dentists always hold back a belly-laugh when that happens.

Later, I would add this lesson to my life list of “never do stupid things like this ever again.” I rate this item below the “never pluck giant icicles off rain gutters” lesson. I have a scar above my lips from that youthful encounter with a shiny object syndrome addiction of glittering winter icicle stalactites.

Anyway, *Spilanthes* is native to the extensive Amazonia areas of Brazil. Its naked yellow flower-head (containing several sub-flowers like *Rudbeckia occidentalis* described above) usually develops a reddish top. This appearance suggests, for many observers, a freaky alien eyeball (assuming they have them.)

Blooming throughout the summer months, this plant grows slightly over a foot tall but more in length. Other than those bug-eyed flowers, the plant nonchalantly blends with the other plants in your border.

This tropical plant is more than a curiosity item for your garden. How anyone discovered its mouth-numbing properties is questionable. The active chemical within the plant is spilanthol, which interferes with mammalian nervous system pathways causing numbness.

Researchers use the leaves and flowers for other medical needs, such as potential treatments for malaria, urinary problems, and antiseptic

solutions. More research and experimentation continues, but this plant's pharmacological wonders look promising. One word of advice is don't experiment with it on yourself if you have any aches or pains.

Spilanthes prefers to grow in sunny to partly sunny locations and in well-drained, fertile, moist soil. It makes an excellent container planting for a deck or patio. You can also place it on a sunny windowsill for the winter.

You cannot find seeds or potted plants in your garden center. Most gardeners do not know of this plant, but you do now. You can purchase seeds from larger online merchants who specialize in rare plants.

Tanacetum – Costmary or Bible Leaf

Tanacetum balsamita or *Chrysanthemum balsamita*



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Praise the Lord and my heavenly aromatic bookmarker.

There is confusion on what to name this plant. It does not grow or look like a “mum,” so why is it in the same Latin classification? Oh, no matter; we will let the botanists fight over naming it.

Easily overlooked, it is a rather dull plant. It has large leaves, rarely flowers, and sort of creeps along the ground. So, what makes this a unique plant? It’s those leaves. They are bright green and intensely scented of spearmint when you handle them. This ‘claim to fame’ goes way back throughout history, known to the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans,

barbarians, and throughout the Middle Ages. During this time, they called it Costmary.

Then the Puritans, in the 1600s, called it **Bible Leaf**. This name refers to its usage by parishioners as a bookmark — or in this case, The Book page-marker. They would use the large leaves to mark a page in the Bible or use a leaf as a stimulant to wake themselves up during rather dull and endless sermons. By rubbing a leaf under their noses, the heavenly minty aroma would open their eyes and mental attention in an instant.

Today, people use the dried leaves as an ingredient in potpourri and brew as a strong mint tea. I guess today's church sermons are more stimulating.

This plant loves to grow in full sunlight to partial shade, adaptable to many soils and is hardy to most growing zones. Can I get a hallelujah? It grows to about one foot tall and slowly spreads out along the ground.

To get this plant — locate specialty herb nurseries in your area or online. So sayeth the Lord, Amen.

Tryicyrtis – Toadlily

Tricyrtis hirta; T. formosana



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I wonder if this hand lotion has moisturizing properties?

Throughout this ebook (and my other flower gardening ebooks — yes, shameless plug), I always write about plants and flowers I have either grown or viewed in nurseries and public gardens. This plant is different — I never heard of it. Out of intrigued curiosity, I researched it and to my surprise, several online mail-order nurseries sell several varieties of this plant. Customer comments from these nurseries' websites rave about the beauty of these perennials.

Many gardeners may also be unfamiliar with this hardy, shade-loving perennial. One reason is, it blooms in the late summer and throughout the fall months. Garden centers and nurseries, large and small, have difficulty selling fall flowering plants for springtime sales.

Another reason is this plant's name may discourage people from planting it. Toad Lilies? Toad? You can forgive the name if you look at the flowers — they are gorgeous!

There are over 20 known plant species, but they can interbreed and create massive numbers of hybrid varieties, all with wild-and-crazy colorful flowers. The one to two-inch, star-shaped blossoms have a base color, such as white, yellow, or pale blue (again, this depends on the variety) but have many contrasting colorful spots. Protruding from the center of each blossom is the pistil and anthers, and they too have spots.

Toad Lilies are hardy from zones 4 (or 5) to 8 and originate from eastern Asia, China, Japan, and the Philippines. According to an unsubstantiated report, the toad nickname began with the Philippine Tasaday Indians smearing *Tricyrtis* flower juice on their hands before setting out to collect frogs for... a dinner entrée, a frog-jumping contest, something fun to do on a lazy Saturday afternoon — I don't know. They collect frogs — period. That "report" did not go into further detail.

Well, the word toad and not frog eventually became associated with this plant. The more rational (and simple) explanation for the toad-name is those spotted-dotted flowers resemble the skin-bumps on a toad. The things people imagine when naming plants is delightfully mind-boggling.

Let's get back to the facts about this plant. It thrives in partial to full shade, moist but well-drained, fertile soil, but will suffer if the soil dries for an extended time.

The plants can grow from one to three feet tall and become bushy. In its native lands, it grows by woodland edges or near stream banks. Try to

avoid exposure to the intense afternoon sun, for it will limit flower production.

Gardeners experienced in raising these plants recommend growing them in containers to get 'up-close-and-personal' to enjoy the individual flowers' beauty.

There are several varieties of this perennial. It would not be possible for me to list and describe them all. Two of the most "commonly offered" species and varieties belong to *Tricyrtis hirta* and *Tricyrtis formosana*. Breeders have crossed both these species with each other and with other species to form unusual hybrid varieties.

Vigna - Corkscrew Vine

Vigna caracalla



This butterbean graduated with an advanced degree in aeronautics.

Dominicus Vigna (1581-1647), an Italian scientist and botanist, received the honor of having this vine named after him. If you ever have

a plant named for you, let's hope it is as memorable as this lovely plant.

Related to the familiar Lima Bean grown in the vegetable garden, this vine produces large clusters of Sweet Pea-like flowers. They are white and purple-blue but change to creamy yellow with age and contorted into a corkscrew or snail shell-shaped appearance. But the huge deal is their strong spring Hyacinth fragrance.

It thrives in full to part sun (for maximum flower production), good soil, and moderate watering. It needs to grow on a stable supporting structure such as a sturdy trellis or fence, for the vine can grow to a height of 15 feet by fall. Don't worry, for plenty of flowers will be at eye and nose level. You can also try to raise this vine in a large-sized hanging basket to let the flowers cascade downward.

You can enjoy them from mid-summer and well into fall before a hard frost kills the top growth.

Native to Central and South America's jungles, this vine is hardy to zone 9 to 10. For most gardens, it is an annual in cold climates. You can dig up the swollen tuberous taproot by carefully lifting the root from the ground. Then wash and store it in damp peat moss or potting soil in a cool but frost protected area over the winter. In the late spring, after the threat of frost has passed, you can replant this root.

Some seed companies sell the seeds, but you need to purchase them early, for they always sell out. I have never seen plants offered by nurseries.

Conclusion

As I mentioned in the *Introduction*, adding unusual flowers to a garden (or in containers) creates interest and curiosity. You view wondrous species and varieties most other gardeners never encounter or take an interest in.

English poet William Cowper penned the poem "*The Task*" in 1785. In it, he wrote, "*Variety is the very spice of life, That gives it all its flavor.*"

You can rewrite his poem like this: "Unique flower varieties are the very spice of a garden, that gives it all its grandeur."

Become an explorer in discovering unique flowers to energize a bland flower garden into one of unsurpassed beauty and wonder.

Thank you for reading this ebook.

I hope you have enjoyed reading this ebook about growing unusual and wondrous garden flowers.

My other ebooks, *Must-Grow Garden Flowers* and *Your Antique Rose Garden*, also list unique flowers you may wish to grow in your garden.

Please visit my author website of <https://gedwinvarner.com> concerning these and other ebooks along with contact information.

About the Author

G. Edwin Varner grew up on a farm helping his father in the crop fields and assisting his mother in the flower and vegetable gardens. This early experience and learning led him to receive a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology with a minor in Botany.

For twenty years he successfully owned and operated a fragrant flower mail-order nursery. Unlike most mail-order nurseries publishing colorful but expensive pictorial catalogs, his frugal catalog extensively described the flowers he grew. He once said, "I write a thousand words worth a picture in my catalogs." Today, he has the same style of writing (thankfully with fewer words) through a variety of enjoyable and informative ebooks. This time, the ebooks include color photos of each flower.

He encourages you to cultivate something unique and beautiful in your gardens. His motto is "read about it, see it, grow it, and enjoy it!"

G. Edwin Varner lives in a rural area of northeastern Ohio, USA.