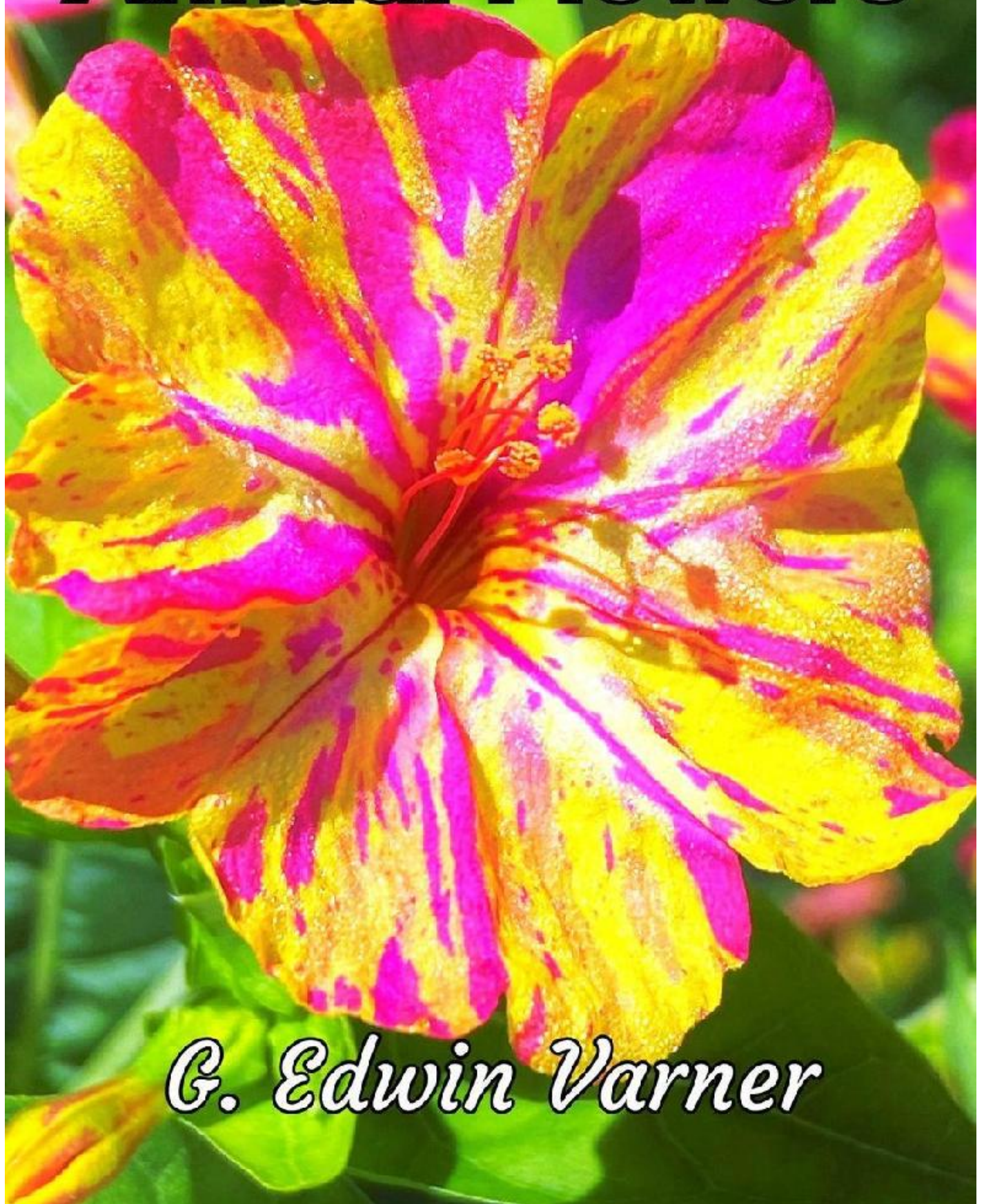


# Fantastic Annual Flowers



*G. Edwin Varner*

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G. Edwin Varner

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FANTASTIC ANNUAL FLOWERS

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Written by G. Edwin Varner.

# Preface

Feeling tired of growing the same types of annual flowers in your garden each year? Then, it's time to elevate your expectations by planting several uncommon, some even rare, annuals that will remake your beds and borders from boringly bland to interesting and lively.

Portions of this publication's content are from my previous ebooks on different floral subjects. I revised the wording and corrected some now-noticeable factual and grammatical errors.

The digital photos are of the flowers at my home, public gardens, many nurseries within my area, and Creative Commons (CC0) licensed images.

# Introduction

Are you a bored flower gardener tired of the same annual plants sold in seed catalogs and garden centers? Maybe you dread another summer viewing those usual yawn-inducing impatiens, red geraniums, marigolds, petunias, and zinnias. You wish you could spruce up your beds and borders so they can “pop and zing” with vitality.

*Have you expressed several times the pessimistic attitude of “I grew them and never again,” or “I’m sick and tired of those flowers,” or blatantly questioning, “Why should I bother growing them again this year?”*

If you have expressed those thoughts lately, it's time to find an uplifting solution to this defeatist attitude. You can find some compelling, unusual, and intriguing annual plants ready to energize your summer with fantastic beauty. You will feel the pleasure of flower gardening returning after a long absence. Don't be a conformist — be a rebellious or revolutionary gardener abandoning the commonly grown annual flowering plants in favor of raising the lesser-known ones.

Garden centers rarely offer the following bedding and border plants. Still, you may find them in specialty seed or plant online nursery businesses. Some varieties are challenging to locate but well worth the search and cost.

If you have become a lackluster or lethargic gardener who longs for unusual quick-growing and long-blooming plants, try planting the following annuals listed in this publication. They will give you an energizing jolt of surprise and satisfaction that recaptures the pride of being or becoming an adventurous flower gardener.

# Alonsoa – Mask Flower

## *Alonsoa meridionalis*



Are you looking for a red flowering annual with vivid, exciting, stupendous, surprising, and other thrilling descriptive words? Look no further.

This “blooming machine” hails from South America, near Peru, and is a perennial. If you live in zone 9 or higher, it can be a perennial for you as well. All other areas subjected to cold conditions have to settle on it being an annual. But, it still grows well from seed to give a wowzer of a display during the summer.

It is a distant cousin of our regularly grown snapdragons, though it’s difficult to see the resemblance. The leaves are dark green, and the

slender stems hold clusters of one-inch red blossoms. The plants grow to almost two feet tall and are bushy.

Plant these beauties near the front of the border or even in containers. They love as much sunlight as possible and fertile, well-drained soil. They can look messy by mid to late summer, but don't worry. Clip them back by half, and they will be re-blooming within two weeks.

Seeds and plants are difficult to find, but large online nurseries specializing in rare plants may have them available. If you find some seeds, sow them indoors about six to eight weeks before the expected last spring frost, but transplant them outdoors after the frost danger has passed.

# Angelonia

## *Angelonia angustifolia*



A relative of our common *Antirrhinum* or snapdragon, this beautiful plant is native from Mexico to Argentina. They are perennial growers there, but elsewhere are fast-growing and long-blooming annuals.

Angelonia is the “new flowering kid on the block,” for this plant first appeared in garden centers in the late 1990s. They were spindly things with small, unattractive, wide-spaced flowers, and gardeners were not impressed with them. But breeders considered they had significant improvement potential. They were correct in their assessment. Since then, growers have supplied garden centers with many outstanding, colorful, ever-blooming varieties.

The flower colors range from blue to purple, with some having pink or white petals. Some types have brilliant eye-catching bi-coloring. One other remarkable quality of these plants is the foliage. When handled, the leaves smell of apples or grapes! What we have here is a delightful multitasking plant.

This plant prefers to grow in full sunlight and well-drained, fertile soil in containers, beds, or borders. Treat it like regular snapdragons, and it will provide you with summer-long enjoyment. Occasionally, clip off spent flower spikes to encourage fresh growth and new flower formation to enhance continuous blooming.

# Arctotis – Blue-Eyed Daisy

## *Arctotis grandis*



Many plants have daisy-like names. This one earns the title for having an attractive steel-blue center cone surrounded by a light-yellow ring or band. The petals are off-white; some gardeners call it pearl-white, for they have a slight iridescence, thus, the less-common nickname of African Pearl Daisy. Oh, I adore the name and this plant!

This species comes from South Africa and is a tender perennial, but for many gardeners, they are annuals. They love as much sunlight as possible and well-drained, fertile soil. They like to grow in hot and semi-dry locations if you have such a troublesome area.

You will be very disappointed if you plant this for evening garden enjoyment. Unlike most other daisies, this species closes its flowers for the night and reopens them at dawn. It must feel the evening chill and wrap itself up for the night.

Although it produces many flowers over the summer, it can become untidy and spindly unless you clip back the spent blossoms. Doing so makes it create more flowers and form a better-looking plant. Speaking of which, try to grow many plants—one or two do not give an impressive display. They are easy to germinate and grow from seed, but try to sow them early indoors in the spring. You will have larger plants to set out after all frost has ended.

Garden centers and nurseries do not grow this plant, but online seed businesses may have them available. These flowers are well worth finding and growing!

# Brachyscome – Swan River Daisy

## Brachyscome iberidifolia



Who can dismiss growing any daisy in a flower garden? Specifically, can you neglect to raise blue daisies? This Australian native named after the Swan River in western Australia will never disappoint you with all-summer blooming blue petal blossoms with bright yellow centers. Some types also display purple, pink, and white flowers with either yellow or black centers.

They grow symmetrically mounded, making them excellent bedding by quickly filling an area. The flower stems rise above the foliage so that you will see an abundance of petals for most of the summer.

This plant is borderline maintenance-free, but an occasional trimming of the many spent blooms helps ensure better re-blooming splendor later in the summer.

Naturally grown along the Swan River banks, this daisy enjoys well-drained, fertile, and moist soil. That being said, too much watering will cause its roots to rot. It can withstand occasional drought conditions but, ironically, appears to dislike hot and muggy environments. Ensure the plants grow in as much sunlight as possible to provide the best growth and blooming. Shady locations are not in the best interest of this plant's survival.

You can easily grow this plant by seed or purchase starter plants from your local garden center for faster and longer enjoyment.

There is some confusion concerning this plant and another similar-looking daisy called *Felicia amelloides*, or the Cape Town Blue Daisy. Think of this one as a doppelgänger of Brachyscome. A doppelgänger is a person (or thing, in this case) that resembles another individual living elsewhere. For Felicia, you will learn more about it in a few more sections on how it closely resembles Brachyscome, even though it looks and grows in similar circumstances on another continent.

# Browallia

## *Browallia speciosa* or *Browallia americana*



Although classified as a tropical plant, Browallia is an annual in most gardens. Johan Browallius (1707-1755), a Swedish botanist, bishop, and physician, discovered it growing in South America. I guess he couldn't decide which occupation to have for a living.

This fantastic annual belongs to the same family as tobacco and petunias. It has the familiar names of Sapphire Flower, Bush Violet, or Amethyst Flower; the star-shaped petals are vivid blue, purple, and white. Easy to grow from seeds sown in the early spring, they will grow and bloom by midsummer in beds and containers. They can also make an indoor potted plant for the winter if placed in a well-lit and warm area.

Browallia grows well in well-drained, fertile soil in full sun to partly shady locations. They can grow up to two feet tall and wide in garden beds and bloom all summer. When grown in containers, clip them back occasionally to control their height.

Three excellent modern varieties, **Endless Illumination**, **Blue Bells**, and **Marine Bells**, sport large, indigo to purple blossoms with small, white centers. These named-variety plants are available in larger garden centers, and species seeds are available in rare seed catalogs. The flowers of the species are much smaller than the cultivated varieties grown today but produce many blossoms.

# Calibrachoa

## Calibrachoa species hybrids



This is one of the new bedding plants offered by larger garden centers but is still uncommon in many locations. These plants are native to the open grasslands of Brazil, Chile, Peru, and Argentina, along with wild petunias, but are often mistaken for non-related mini-petunias. They even grow alongside them, which confused botanists into thinking they were small-flowered petunias.

Discovered at the same time as petunias (early to mid-19th century), they gained notoriety in the 1990s. This begs the question of why it took so long to acknowledge their existence.

An apparent reason is that Calibrachoa has a multitude of small blossoms, giving it the nickname “**Million Bells.**” For most of flower gardening history, larger flowers (in this case, the petunias) had more priority in attention and for growing. Plants with small flowers (even those with thousands of them) always seem to be a limiting factor in being popular plants. I can imagine what Dr. Sigmund Freud would have said about this botanical-physiological hybrid observation.

Unlike most upright petunias, these plants are sprawlers – some people describe them as “spillers” – for they can cascade over containers, hanging baskets, or carpet the flower bed as a groundcover. These plants can have bright, splashy, contrasting colors. Some varieties have double petals and resemble tiny roses. Also, unlike the pampered petunias, these plants can tolerate drier growing conditions.

One undesirable trait against Calibrachoa (specifically their hybrids) is they produce few seeds, which is a limiting factor in raising them in bulk by garden centers. This lack of seeds limits their availability to consumers.

Most of these plants offered today are cutting-grown and patented or trademarked by one commercial company. It has “cornered the market” in producing and selling these plants to gardeners. Having this patent prohibits propagation by other plant propagation businesses. Unfortunately, that makes these plants more expensive and uneconomical for bedding. We can all hope by the time you read this, it will solve the seed-production limitations, and other companies will be able to sell the plants.

# Callistephus – China Aster

## Callistephus chinensis



What looks like an aster, chrysanthemum, and peony all at the same time? You don't have to look any further than this delightful daisy-like annual. New varieties can temporarily confuse even experienced gardeners on what type of plant it is with their fluffy or billowy blossoms.

Native to China, North and South Korea, this colorful plant has delighted gardeners worldwide. Many people think of it as being an essential cottage garden inhabitant. The flowers can display single to double petals in a wide range of vivid colors, highlighted with a central disk of bright yellow disk florets. The hybrid varieties will display flowers up to five inches in diameter.

All these descriptions are lovely on their own for growing them for cut flowers. Still, the best trait is their having long, sturdy stems culminating in a single flower. Over the summer, hybrid varieties will produce several flower clusters.

Like many other annuals, these plants can germinate and grow quickly and, if prevented from forming seeds by deadheading, can bloom for most of the summer. All of this depends on you providing the best growing conditions. They prefer to spend their days in as much sunshine and fertile, moist (but not constantly wet), well-drained soil.

Older varieties had a troubling habit of developing viral and fungal diseases when crowded together or grown in humid, partly shady areas. Newer types may occasionally experience this problem, but less severe.

For cut flower enjoyment, grow the hybrid types, not only for their better disease resistance but also for those having longer, sturdier stems. Some varieties, such as the **Tower Series**, can grow to over three feet and are bushy. Their peony-like blossoms have a diverse range of colors. Each plant has the potential to produce many stems over the summer.

If you enjoy growing bizarre flower types, add the following variety to your garden. It's a "Marvel" to observe and appreciate.

***Callistephus chinensis "Hulk"***



Sometimes, things do not go as planned in gardening and can make us angry. For example, when deer, rabbits, and insects decide to dine on the most expensive or rarer types of plants, or a loved one (usually a non-gardening husband — sorry guys) mistakenly performs a weed-whacking frenzy on some almost-to-bloom perennials thinking they were overgrown weeds. Fortunately, we do not act like Dr. Bruce Banner and transform into *The Incredible Hulk*, but we can become enraged like him, can't we?

The Marvel Comics character aside, this overgrown "Incredible Aster" should not scare you. In fact, you should love its company in any bed, border, container, or as a talk-about cut flower for your home. The composite "flower" looks positively imposing, unique, and... green. It forms not petals but enlarged sepals or leaflets bordering a crown of the actual "naked" greenish-yellow to white florets. It resembles a sunny-side-up fried green egg. Now, that's scary!

Like the previous listing of our regular China Asters, the Hulk enjoys a partly sunny location and fertile, well-drained soil. It will need more room to flex its girth within a bed, so allow it some extra space between plants. Each plant can grow upward and across by nearly two feet and produce several five-inch blooms over the summer. Florists go absolutely “gaga” over this plant, for these large blooms last several days in a vase.

With all the excitement over this plant, garden centers, and seed businesses would have it available for everyone. Not so—and here you can have a reason to get down-right ‘Hulky’ angry. I had a devil of a time locating a source of seeds. Fortunately, I found a small family-owned internet nursery that sold them—for a premium price. Oh well, beggars can’t be choosers. Once you grow this plant, make sure you save some seeds!

## Cassia – Popcorn Cassia

*Cassia didymobotrya* or *Senna didymobotrya*



This plant is becoming more well-known as garden centers slowly offer more unknown flowers to adventurous gardeners. Native to Africa, this plant has vivid yellow, pea-like blossoms on long spikes. The top unopened buds on each end are black or dark purple.

The real surprise with this plant is the leaves smell of hot, buttered popcorn when rubbed with your fingers. You may feel the need to lick your buttery fingers but don't do it. Garden critters such as bugs, bunnies, and deer dislike this leaf odor and possibly the taste.

It is only hardy perennial in zones 9 to 11 but is classified as a shrub or small tree in tropical Africa. Elsewhere, it is classified as an annual. The

plant prefers to grow in sunshine and well-drained, fertile soil to provide plenty of summer blooms.

You can find seeds in catalogs or online businesses and may be lucky to find potted plants in garden centers.

This one will be at the top of the list to spark “flower lust” at your next garden club meeting. To jumpstart member interest, bring along a bag of hot buttered popcorn.

# Catharanthus – Annual Vinca or Madagascar Periwinkle

*Catharanthus roseus; formerly Vinca rosea*



Although the name is similar, gardeners should not confuse this plant with the perennial, sky-blue flowered groundcover called Vinca or Periwinkle (*Vinca minor*.) Even botanists were once confused and grouped it within the *Vinca* genus. The flowers may look similar, but both plants are now considered unrelated. Familiar names will always create some confusion between different plants.

Why is this plant grown less often? Native to the island nation of Madagascar, it loves to grow in hot conditions and full sunlight and tolerates dry soil. It also provides many colorful flowers above glossy

green foliage all summer. The reason for this unfortunate overlook is we try to avoid growing beautiful flowers in hot, sunny locations experiencing periodic dry soil. The improbable exception is *Impatiens*, for some crazy reason, which makes for large water bills. Few plants appreciate those semi-arid conditions, but *Catharanthus* doesn't mind—to a point. The occasional drink of water is always appreciated and rewarded with more flowers.

Growing to less than two feet tall and wide, *Catharanthus* blooms well in a bed, border, or container. By planting them in the fertile and well-drained humus-based soil, you do not have to worry about the occasional dry-out of the ground. They will bloom well if they receive plenty of sunlight during the day.

The flower colors range from pink, lavender, neon, rosy-red, and white. Most have a white or deeper color center (the “eye”) to each blossom. White flowers can have a delightful, vivid, reddish-rose center.

This plant is proven to be very poisonous. However, chemicals within its sap show promising results in killing cancer cells—especially leukemia cancer. Who knows what medical miracles these and other garden flowers can cure?

Finding this plant in commercial garden centers can be challenging. You may have better luck by visiting smaller nurseries specializing in growing unusual plants. You can find seeds in seed catalogs, but raising these plants from seed may prove difficult. The germination and growing conditions need to have constant warm and moist soil. Cold temperatures only delay germination and stunt seedling growth. If you can locate well-grown young bedding plants (sold in plastic four-packs), latch on to them. These plants are well worth growing and enjoying.

# Celosia – Cockscomb

***Celosia argentea* var. *cristata*; *plumosa*; *spicata***



I live close to a few Amish communities. During the summer, when they have their weekly livestock auction sales, I will see Amish ladies selling bouquets of these highly colorful but strange-looking flowers that look drawn from a Dr. Seuss book. While traveling around, you can see their gardens or outside boundaries of farm fields dotted with the glowing colors of these and other flowers.

Besides being exceptionally pretty, Celosia is excellent for cut and dried flower arrangements, and the smaller types are popularly grown in containers. The flowers differ in color, size, and shape but appear furry velvet. In Mexico, for example, their nickname is “Velvet Flowers.”

There are three species (and assorted hybrids) of Celosia flowers:

- For many people, the *Celosia argentea* var. *crispata* varieties flaunt pleasantly gaudy, rounded, folded, brain-shaped flowers on tall stems. A popular color is blood red or purplish-red — the reason for naming Celosia as cockscombs.
- Another species is *spicata*, which has smaller but abundant spiky flowers resembling wheat heads.
- The third species is *plumosa*, in which the tiny flowers are airy, feathery, or resemble fire flames (like the above photo illustrates.)

You can choose from many varieties by seed or purchase plants in garden centers. Raising them from seed is lengthy, so if you live in colder locations, your best plan is to buy plants.

All Celosias prefer to grow in sunny locations with well-drained soil. When raised in beds or borders, they dislike constant moist ground and clay-based soils. Adding sand or coarse gravel to a bed will help establish well-grown plants and abundant flowers for the picking.

# Centratherum – Brazilian Bachelor Buttons

**Centratherum intermedium camporum**



You may be familiar with the regular, but still popularly grown, annual Bachelor Buttons (*Centaurea cyanus*). In that case, this will look almost the same but with one noticeable exception – the leaves and flower heads have a strong pineapple or fruit punch fragrance. Because of the fragrant oils on the leaves, insects and, possibly, deer, bugs, and bunnies dislike eating them.

You must handle the leaves and flowers to release that exceptionally strong fruit punch perfume. The hot sun can also release the fragrance, but not as much as touching the plant. These blossoms are ever-

blooming with blue to light purple double-petaled 'fluffy-looking' flowers.

Raise this plant in a full to partly sunny bed or border having well-drained, fertile soil. Although hardy to zones 10 and 11, it is strictly an annual for most areas.

It grows to nearly two feet tall and is bushy. Fear not; gardeners avoiding tall growing plants can trim the topmost shoots, which will benefit by limiting their height. Look for the variety **Button Beauty**, for its flower heads are much larger than the species, and it grows quickly from seed. Forget about finding plants in garden centers.

# Ceratotheca – South African Foxglove

## *Ceratotheca triloba*



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

Related to snapdragons (*Antirrhinum*) it is native to South Africa and hardy from zones 9 to 10. This plant has the potential to grow over six feet tall in a flower bed, but when grown in a large container, it will be half that size. Trimming the top shoots will delay flowering and form several side shoots, ready to develop many more flowers over the summer. Raise it in full to partial sunlight and well-drained fertile soil

to achieve maximum blooming. 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, the plant never became well-known to American gardeners for some unexplained reason. In Victorian England, it became the rage in British gardening society and was later on... forgotten. Just like the adage, here today—gone tomorrow.

Growing it must have been a 'fad,' and afterward, gardeners became obsessed with the new-fangled bedding-type flowers. We gardeners have a psychological condition similar to 'shiny object syndrome' 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 some internet seed companies will have seeds available. Don't worry; this plant is easy to grow from seed and raise to enjoy those eye-catching, beautiful flowers. As a special treat, you will also enjoy watching bumblebees climb into the flowers, searching for nectar, "disappear," and later emerge.

# Coleus

## Coleus blumei



Native to Southeast Asia, Coleus has always been popular as colorful foliage annual plants for gardens, containers, and houseplants. They resemble gorgeous stained-glass windows with vivid colors and unusual geometric patterns. Newer varieties are pleasantly gaudy with eye-popping beautiful colors. You can't resist growing a few when you see them in nurseries and garden centers.

Years ago, most Coleus grew only from seed, but many nurseries now showcase select cultivars propagated from cuttings. Instead of having mixtures of odd multi-colorful plants raised from seed, now you can have beds of the same color — either as stained glass displays or as single vivid 'eye opener' shades.

Coleus has the potential to look horrible when grown from seed. There are too many color patterns and sizes of plants. A bed or border will look like a chromatic explosion happened. Please take my advice to plant cutting-grown varieties of one colorful type (or two complementary color patterns) for beds or containers. The real surprise is seeing only them growing in a bed or border. Single plants may spark some interest, but when grown in masses, the sight is unbelievable.

New varieties are now bred to develop fewer flowers. Yes, less flower formation! The tiny blue blossoms on thin stems can distract the overall look of the plants when they are growing in the garden.

Although they can tolerate more sunlight than older varieties, they still grow and look best in partly shady areas. The full intensity of sunlight will damage the leaves, developing brown splotches and faded colors.

Now, what is out there for you to find and grow? Plan on pillaging local nurseries and garden centers for those unique cutting-grown varieties. They will be more expensive, but all the selections will be similar when you plant them in the garden. For now, look for the newer ColorBlaze and Kong varieties. Please read the labels to determine their sun exposure requirements and their potential height.

A joyful warning — you will become addicted to growing these plants!

# **Convolvulus – Bush Morning Glory; Dwarf Morning Glory**

**Convolvulus tricolor “Royal Ensign”**



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I pleasantly suffer from “Shiny Object Syndrome.” When viewing any flower garden, I also exhibit a similar condition called “Blue Flower Syndrome.” Any shiny, glittery object or vivid blue flower I will instantly gravitate to and become mesmerized.

One such type of annual I have become enamored by is this magnificent relative of the Morning Glory. Each three-inch diameter trumpet-shaped flower displays gorgeous cobalt-blue petals surrounding a starburst pattern of brilliant white with a buttercup yellow center. This

is my kind of “bling” to accessorize any flower garden bed, border, or container.

You may think this is a recent floral introduction to gardeners, but it is not. This plant was also being gazed at and hypnotized by those colors back in the 1700s. But here lies a problem: why isn't this plant more planted or acknowledged by the gardening public?

You can find seeds in any catalog, website, or garden center. Strangely, none are offered as starter plants in nurseries or seen displayed in any garden. One explanation I can think of is that it's referenced as a Morning Glory. Technically, it is not a true glory but a relation.

One explanation is it forms a slight vining habit, but most of the growth is mounded. This plant grows to a foot tall and twice as wide on average. Unlike a morning glory, it blooms all day and non-stop until a killing fall frost. What's not to like about those qualities?

Start sowing the seeds indoors for transplanting outdoors after the threat of frost. The plants prefer warm soil, so don't worry about waiting a couple of weeks longer for the ground to become so. These plants prefer sunlight and the usual fertile, well-drained soil requirements. Plant an entire bed of these flowers, and don't be surprised if I notice them from afar and visit you some sunny afternoon to admire their beauty.

# Coreopsis – Tickseed

## *Coreopsis tinctoria*



These attractive annual and perennial plants are ideal for any flower garden. The perennial varieties are easy to grow and become a no-fuss, problem-free attraction once established in your garden.

An old but still popular annual species is the *Coreopsis tinctoria* or the **Plains Coreopsis**. Tall growing to over three feet, it sports a multitude of eye-catching bright yellow daisies with brownish-red centers. You will always find new plants sprouting each spring from its self-sown seeds.

Being a vibrant-colored member of the daisy family, it gets its unusual nickname of tickseed because its seeds resemble blood-engorged ticks.

Oh, that's sick! The things people imagine are borderline disturbing.

Coreopsis will bloom all summer if planted in full sunlight and fertile, well-drained soil. They dislike clay-based soils and prefer a more sandy or gravelly medium.

Most annual and perennial varieties produce long, slender, sturdy stems — ideal for adding to mixed flower bouquets. Your bonus for growing these plants is usually over one flower per stem. Hey, the more the merrier!

To ensure all summer blooming, always deadhead spent flowers to prevent excessive seed formation, which can “shut down” further flower production for the season.

You should be able to find seeds in most garden centers or online nurseries. I have not seen potted plants in nurseries, however.

# Cosmidium

## Cosmidium burridgeanum



This is a relatively new annual with little information available for most gardeners. How about you get acquainted with this dynamo of a grower and a powerhouse of a bloomer?

The plant is a native Texas wildflower with no common name (yet), so we will use the Latin name. It is another member of the impressive daisy family with wiry stems and stunning displays of yellow-tipped with purple-red-brown centered Cosmos-like blossoms.

*Cosmidium* has an unprecedented strong aroma of chocolate or cocoa. You can smell the intense chocolate fragrance from all the many — and I do mean A LOT of — flowers. It is easy to grow from seeds sprinkled

on flower beds and should appeal to children and all adult chocoholics. It is ideal for spreading in beds, rock gardens, and containers.

The plant produces so many flowers for the summer that it will wear itself out, especially while forming new seeds. For a little proactive maintenance, take the time to clip spent flowers back during the summer to encourage more blooming until a fall frost.

Individual plants can grow to about two feet tall and wide. Planting a large clump or group is more attractive and provides more chocolatey perfume for the garden.

Look for the variety called **Philippine** in published or online seed catalogs. It grows shorter and bushier than the typical species plant. You will not find this plant in garden centers, either as potted plants or in seed racks. However, you can find seeds in some internet seed businesses, so make sure to “search away” on your favorite browser to discover them.

# **Craspedia – Drumstick Flower**

## **Craspedia globosa**



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When you think of Australia and New Zealand, you immediately visualize their marsupial animals, such as kangaroos, koala bears, and the Tasmanian Devil. 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 (no, this is not a marsupial daisy!), appearing as yellow ping-pong balls stuck on stems. This impressionistic view is not an exaggeration.

The perfectly spherical flower heads are suspended on stiff, wiry stems above clumps of grass-like silvery-green leaves. 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) through online nurseries than your local garden center.

# Cuphea – Bat Face Cuphea; Tiny Mice

## Cuphea llavea



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 these blossoms are, 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 it can only muster as a

low-growing annual shrub for your garden.

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, increases 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 they will take longer to grow and bloom.

# Felicia – Cape Town Blue

## *Felicia amelloides*



As promised, there needs to be more clarity concerning this plant and another similar-looking daisy called *Brachyscome* or the Swan River Daisy described earlier. Think of this one as a doppelgänger of *Brachyscome*. For Felicia, it closely resembles it, even though it looks and grows in similar circumstances on another continent, in this case, Africa, specifically in South Africa. My, isn't Mother Nature a trickster!

Felicia's flowers mirror those of *Brachyscome* with true-blue petals and bright yellow inner disc florets. Unlike *Brachyscome*, blue is the only color, but who cares? You can't have enough blue in any garden!

Instead of having mounding growth, Felicia spreads more horizontally than vertically. The flowers and stems heighten this plant while the leafy shoots extend outward. For bedding purposes, this expanding growth mimics an attractive small ground cover.

These plants are easy to maintain if grown in a sunny location with fertile and well-drained soil. Although they can withstand some drought conditions, periodic watering (and light fertilizing) is always recommended, but excessive wet soil will kill them.

Their best floral display is from late spring through midsummer, but afterward, with all the previously spent flowers and developing seeds, the plants will look, well... awful. Fear not; all you have to do is give the entire plant a "haircut" by clipping the top growth back to the leaf area. Within a couple of weeks, a fabulous new blue display will result in late summer and fall enjoyment.

You can sow the tiny seeds under grow lights several weeks in advance to set out the young plants after the last spring frost. However, consider purchasing starter plants from garden centers for less work and faster enjoyment.

# **Gazania – African Daisy; Treasure Flower**

**Gazania rigens**



If you have yet to grow this plant, you should. This is a fantastic annual or tender perennial, native to the southern coastal regions of Africa. Related to the vast Aster family with large daisy-like “clustered flowers,” it’s an all-purpose plant for bedding and edging in borders. Their leaves are usually deep green but may have a silvery underside, giving a partial shininess in the bright sunlight.

Those four-inch diameter daisy flowers radiate hot colors of bright yellow and orange, usually with a contrasting central band of molten

lava red. The effect is startling once seen, and you will see plenty of these flowers from late spring till fall.

There is, however, one disappointing caveat with its blooming that tends to disappoint new gardeners. By evening, and especially during cloudy conditions, the flowers close up and remain that way until exposed to the bright sunshine. These plants are true sun worshipers, thriving in hot areas and don't mind semi-drought conditions. Make sure the ground has proper drainage to prevent extended periods of wet soil. Allow the soil to dry between waterings if no rain is forecasted.

Unlike other flowers mentioned before and after, Gazanias are not low-maintenance, for you will need to trim off (usually called deadheading) the spent flower stalks to prevent excessive seed formation. Not doing so makes the display look messy and can prevent extended blooming. Once a week, trimming your plants will keep them blooming for additional weeks.

You can grow different varieties from spring-sown seeds (indoors for colder locations) and later transplant them to the garden after the threat of frost or when the weather is reliably warm. Appreciating hot places, these plants waste little time growing and flowering, so don't fret if you delay transplanting for a few weeks in late spring.

You can purchase young plants in small pots or cell packs from nurseries or garden centers, but they usually offer mixed colors. That's fine, but you may obtain something that is not incredibly colorful. Try to purchase same-color plants (depicted on the label if available.) For a recommendation on what to grow, try finding (either seeds or young plants) of the **Daybreak Series**, including '**Daybreak Red Stripe**' or '**Daybreak Tiger Stripes Mix**,' which have reliable complimentary colors. These types are stunning!

# Gomphrena – Globe Amaranth

## *Gomphrena globosa*



Some garden plants will never gain notoriety, even if they are easy to grow and produce colorful flowers. This unfortunate annual has all the qualifications of grandeur but is eclipsed by our common bedding plants. It may need to hire a better publicity agent.

The strange part of this apparent lack of interest is that it has historically been a welcomed inhabitant in flower gardens worldwide for several years. Although gardeners enjoy it, no one seems ecstatic about its colorful and easy-to-grow merits compared to petunias and impatiens.

There now appears to be a revival of interest in these plants, for breeders and growers are rearranging genes to make these plants more eye-appealing to gardeners.

The flowers have a passing resemblance to clover flower heads. They have a limited range of colors — from pinkish-red to purple and white. One outstanding new variety is **Strawberry Fields**, which has bright red flowers. Other prime growers for your garden are **Lavender Lady**, shown above, with vibrant purple petals, and **Fireworks**, which have fluorescent pinkish-rose blossoms.

Globe Amaranth is one of those easy-to-grow annuals that thrive in sunny, hot, and dry locations. It is native to the southwestern areas of the United States and Mexico. Once it blooms, there is no stopping it until a fall frost.

# Helianthus – Sunflower

**Helianthus annuus; argophyllus**



Most commercially available sunflower seeds are of annual varieties. We are all familiar with the large flower heads of massive, tall plants nodding by the side of vegetable or flower gardens. Over recent years, interest in wildly colorful sunflowers has gained a “cult following.” With genetic advances, 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**. 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 fantastic!

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, and garnet-red to almost black flower heads, such as the **Chianti Hybrid**.

There are even pollen-less types available developed to tap into the cut-flower market. The common bright yellow sunflowers drop considerable amounts of pollen onto shiny, Pledge® - covered tables. Messy, but these new pollen-less types prevent constant cleanup.

Just when you've seen it all—you haven't. Double types are available, with the entire combined flowers within the head being petals, such as the gorgeous yellowish-orange variety called **Honey Bear**.

Recent novel forms developed have an even more surprising construction. One type called **Sun-Fill Purple Hybrid** (which needs a new snazzy name), shown above, has the flower head radically transformed. The prominent outer rings of leaflets or calyx are the dominant feature. They are purplish-green, while the usual circumference of “petals” is significantly reduced in size. The effect is startling to the point of being slightly repulsive but also delightfully intriguing.

One can only guess what remarkable gene-bending developments await us in future sunflower attractions.

# Heliotrope

## *Heliotropium peruvianum*



This plant became honored as “The Annual of the Year” ... in 1898. I think it is long overdue for more tributes. What better way to restart these accolades is to plant this fantastic annual in your garden or several containers?

Native to Peru, it became trendy in the late 19th century because of the flower color and a strong vanilla or almond fragrance. British reference books called it the “Cherry Pie Plant” for the floral color, supposedly similar to pouring milk on a wild black cherry pie slice. Mixing the dark red fruit with the milk forms a dark blue or purple slurry. It ruins a delicious cherry pie, but it produces attractive purple shades.

Heliotrope also makes excellent bedding and container subjects, so remember to pot up a few for the patio. It loves to grow in full sunlight and well-drained, fertile soil. By all means, protect this plant from frost, for it is susceptible to cold.

The best purple variety to grow is **Fragrant Delight**, with dark blue to light blue flower clusters and a superb fragrance. **White Heliotrope** has powder-blue flowers when young and then changes to pure white when older.

Seed packets are available in larger seed company catalogs or online, but purchase those named varieties for faster development and longer summer enjoyment.

# Hypoestes – Polka Dot Plant

## *Hypoestes phyllostachya*



I think of *Hypoestes* as disco *Coleus* plants — colorful leaves but highlighted with contrasting spots, like light reflected from a disco ball. You can strut around your garden like John Travolta (as the character Tony Manero in the movie *'Saturday Night Fever'*) while listening to the soundtrack music. Your neighbors will stare at you, but what of it? All weekend gardeners should experience an occasional “Saturday Afternoon Fever” while puttering around in their flower garden.

Native to Madagascar, these plants are strictly tropical and treated as garden annual bedding or container subjects. They dislike full sunlight and will show it by developing brown leaves. If grown in full-shade areas, the leaves are greener with fewer spots and become tall and

floppy. For the “Goldilocks Zone,” place these plants where they receive partial sun and shade. You can also grow them as houseplants, but they need bright, indirect light to display their colors better.

Breeders and growers have developed several hybrid varieties. There are the **Splash** and **Confetti Series** of small-growing plants having a base color of green but highlighted with various sized spots, smudges, smears, and streaks colored of vivid rose, red, pink, purple, lavender-blue, and, for brightness, pure white. For some varieties, it is difficult to determine if the leaves are splattered green instead of those colors!

These plants will grow over a foot tall and wide, creating stunning displays in beds and containers. Many gardeners pinch off the spikes of tiny blue flowers for they are “uninteresting” (sad but true) and distract attention away from the colorful leaves.

Raise these plants in well-drained, fertile, and moist soil. Don’t be in a hurry to plant them in your garden or containers until late spring or early summer. They dislike cool weather and cold ground.

You may have seen these offered in nurseries and garden centers but passed them by (like I did numerous times.) Next spring, purchase them and turn part of your shady garden or patio into a discotheque.

# Impatiens – Touch-Me-Not or Busy Lizzie

## Impatiens balfourii



Am I including a representative of Impatiens that I downgraded in the Introduction? Well... not precisely. This one is “somewhat different” but is unusual.

Nicknamed the ‘**Poor Man’s Orchid**,’ this is an old-fashioned species native to the Himalayas and Kashmir regions. It was once common in gardens but is now almost forgotten, eclipsed over these many years by the common bedding Impatiens.

Unlike our over-planted and finicky Impatiens, this species makes growing plants from seeds easy. Sow some seeds, and within a few days,

they will germinate and begin growing. The trouble is, they keep on growing. They can extend to almost four feet tall and wide by summer's end. New gardeners will faint, realizing the plants top out at this height. Still, these dimensions add simplistic charm and mesmerizing interest.

Each plant blooms prodigiously all summer, in partly to full shade, and thrives in rich, moist, loamy soil. The flowers are a soothing bi-color of pink and white, resembling miniature orchids. They self-seed like crazy with many self-detonating (touch-me-not) seed pods, so you will find new seedlings germinating throughout your garden the following spring.

Seeds are tricky to find, but some online English seed companies sell them. I have never seen plants offered for sale in garden centers. Gee, I wonder why?

# Ipomoea – Morning-glory

*Ipomoea nil* or *Ipomoea x imperialis*



There are so many morning-glory varieties to choose from. In the 9th century, the Japanese became the first culture to cultivate Morning-glories as an ornamental garden flower. Since then, they have popularized morning glories (especially the nil species) to the rest of the world by creating vividly colorful and highly unusual varieties. This species is the showiest of all morning glories and is highly valued as an ornamental plant (especially a container plant) in Japan.

Growers also refer to the Japanese nil species as Picotee Morning-glories for having a thin white rim around the flower circumference. They are more orderly—forming less long, invasive vines — some becoming bush-like.

For our purposes here, grow the **Cameo Elegance** variety, which has blotchy white leaf variegations and develops vivid pink with white-rimmed blossoms. Complex genetic factors involving incorporating other morning-glory species genes produce few fertile seeds. Morning-glory genetics is a totally messed up affair, creating wildly colorful flowers.

Larger seed businesses showcase a few surprisingly colorful types, including double-flowered ones. For an even better selection, search on eBay for smaller private growers specializing in growing and selling the seeds of these amazingly unusual plants.

Morning-glory seeds are easy to germinate. Plant the young vines in well-drained soil bathed in as much sunlight as possible. Avoid having too much fertile soil to avoid excessive vine formation at the expense of flowers. Train the vines up on bamboo stakes, trellises, or fences, or allow them to cascade from hanging baskets to showcase all those awesome blossoms in the summer morning hours.

# Ipomoea – Sweet Potato Vine

## Ipomoea batatas



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And now for something totally different — but simultaneously related to the above Morning glories — are these decorative vines. It will surprise many people that the vegetable garden sweet potatoes are close relatives to our common Morning glory vines.

Gardeners grow the varieties listed below for their leaf coloration, not their flowers (although pretty if formed), but you should realize these vines do not produce edible sweet potatoes for the dinner table. You can eat them, however, but it has been said they taste “really yucky.” OK. I’ll pass.

As of this writing, two popular varieties are used as contrasting ornamental backdrops to other bedding or container plantings — although you can use them alone or both to enjoy their unusual leaf coloration. The **Terrace Lime** or **Margarita** variety has festive lime-green or chartreuse leaves to brighten any area.



The other type is called **Blackie**, which has dark purple-red to almost black foliage, not to mention a few beautiful white with purple-centered blossoms. This one is perfect for showcasing white-blossomed plants.

Both varieties grow best in partly shady areas but can become adapted to full sunlight. To prevent excessive foliage growth, use well-drained potting soil and avoid over-fertilizing. If the plants get too rowdy, trim them to produce extra side growth.

Garden centers often offer them as starter plants since they are unavailable from seed. Like all Morning glory plants, you can easily self-

propagate more plants via cuttings of shoots. You can usually find some shoots with small rootlets forming on leaf nodes.

For cold-climate gardeners, you can keep these young plants indoors over the winter if pot grown by a window and rooting newly made shoots in the spring to transplant by early summer. Hey, the more, the merrier for next summer's colorful extravaganza of container plantings.

# Isotoma – Star Flower

## *Isotoma axillaris*



If you want your flower bed to be a star attraction with a galaxy of true-blue star-shaped flowers, you must grow this stellar plant. This Australian native will be a supernova of beauty all summer.

OK. Enough of the hokey astronomy references. This plant is ideal for mass-planting in beds and borders. It can grow well with other flowers, but I recommend planting it all by itself to get the most eye-catching delight from this plant.

It can develop as an ever-blooming mound over a foot high, extending twice as broad. It is reasonably easy to maintain, requiring plenty of sunlight and fertile, well-drained soil. The plants can tolerate periodic

dry conditions but still enjoy a weekly refreshing drink of water. Don't make the soil constantly wet; this will make the plant suffer and eventually die.

There appears to be a "perfect" variety that garden centers and landscapers highly recommend growing for outstanding blooming performance. I agree with them. That variety is **Beth's Blue®** (usually sold as **Beth's Blue® Star Flower**.) It's a blooming machine that tolerates hot locations and requires almost no maintenance, including less deadheading of spent flowers (but will look much better with occasional trimming.)

While you can grow the species from seed, it takes almost five months to flower. No, that's too long to wait. Your best recourse is to purchase Beth's Blue®. It is a special cultivar that is vegetatively propagated to preserve its unique qualities. You should be able to find it in many online nurseries and local garden centers, ready to grow and bloom abundantly with vivid blue blossoms.

# Jamesbrittenia – South African Phlox

## *Jamesbrittenia hybrid*



In the theater world, there is always a substitute called a stand-in or understudy, ready to play the critical role if the leading actor is ill or unable to act. This understudy is usually an “unknown” person who has the potential to out-act the principal actor and become an overnight success. *Jamesbrittenia* is such a botanical understudy for planting in any flowerbed or container.

How many of us have heard of this plant or seen its flowers? Until lately, probably never, but that is about to change. Ladies and gentlemen, let me introduce you to this ever-blooming, low-maintenance, heat-tolerant, and vividly colorful annual from South Africa, ready to

perform for you as a beautiful substitute for our more commonly planted flowers.

Purchased from a garden center, I had no preconceived notion of what the floral display would look like. By midsummer, I was shocked at how this plant performed. It bloomed uninterrupted all summer.

It does not grow tall but extends its shoots horizontally and becomes covered with mind-blowing bicolors of rose-pink, purple, orange, and white petals.

Place this plant in as much sunlight as possible and well-drained soil to maximize bloom potential. Adding time-released fertilizer is always a bonus for stimulating outstanding growth throughout the summer and fall. Although listed as drought-tolerant, watering these plants occasionally (if there is no forecast for rain) will be beneficial for constant blooming.

Deadheading or trimming spent flowers is not a top priority with this plant (for the hybrids may be sterile). Still, if the entire plant looks “messy,” a clip here and there will benefit improved beauty.

So, let’s give hearty applause to this currently underappreciated plant for providing our gardens with outstanding beauty throughout the summer and fall. Its floral performance is spectacular.

# Malope – Annual Mallow

## Malope trifida ‘Vulcan’



Looking for an easy-to-grow flower that looks stunning, blooms most of the summer, provides plenty of cut flowers, and is very unusual to amaze your gardening friends? That’s a tall order, but let’s select this plant. As a laid-back member of the prestigious and floriferous Hibiscus —Mallow—Hollyhock family, *Malope* offers all the above advantages combined in one outstanding variety called Vulcan.

While researching this variety, I have seen it referred to as having “drop-dead gorgeous flowers,” “piece-of-cake easy to grow,” and “this is a ‘WOW’ flower!” Even the great garden writer and author Louise Beebe Wilder recommended gardeners grow this plant in 1935. Boldly, we go into a stellar garden, for *Star Trek’s* Mr. Spock would say it would be

illogical not to grow this plant. Gee, what more can be added to extol its outstanding botanical virtues? Well, I'll let you raise it, and then you can include additional euphoric praise. How about "*Live long and prosper?*"

So, with all these outstanding tributes and high honors, it begs the question, "Why isn't this plant more well-known?" Yes, you can find its seeds in a few of the major gardening catalogs, but as for potted starter plants – forget looking. Either I am "flower-blind" when previewing all the flowers offered for sale at nurseries and overlook them, or, most likely, nurseries never grow them. Don't wait for them to re-discover it – you can quickly grow this plant from seed.

The four-inch, five-petal blossoms have a rose-pink sheen with stripes and a stunner of a spring-green star-shaped base (called the calyx). Yes, this is a "WOW" flower. The plant can grow over three feet tall, but you can control this height by nipping the top-most growth.

Like most other annual flowers, this plant prefers to grow in fertile, well-drained soil and be exposed to as much sunlight as possible. Plant it in your flower bed for maximum enjoyment, but a few tucked into containers will also be acceptable, but they will offer less flowering.

# Mirabilis – Four O’Clock or Marvel of Peru

## Mirabilis jalapa



The other common name for these fragrant flowers is Marvel of Peru, for they are native to this area of South America. The tubular flowers can be white, pink, red, or yellow. There are unique multi-colored varieties called **Broken Colors** (shown above and on the ebook cover) and **Marbles**, which have vivid stripes, splashes, smears, spots, and blemishes of different colors on the same flower. Even each blossom has a distinct color pattern!

These plants' Latin name means “marvelous,” referring to their floral beauty. That word also describes why they should be planted in your

flower bed. Maybe more detailed information about these plants wouldn't hurt.

The colorful flowers stay closed for most of the day until late afternoon. Growing in partial shade, they may open after four o'clock. To be specific, it's a 4:00 pm plant. However, it will still be in bloom by 4:00 am, but I would not set an alarm clock to find out. If the time-telling act does not interest you, possibly the color, size, and number of blossoms will.

Commonly grown in the 19th century, we do not consider it a front-runner for bedding or border edging today. One reason is we now have many more bedding flowers to choose from in nurseries. But, unlike those grown back then, new, exciting varieties, including the Broken Colors and Marbles types, are available today.

These plants are easy to grow from seed and grow like a shrub, depending on where you live. In warmer climate gardens, the plants can become bushy. They can be perennial in more temperate locations (zones 7 to 10 if protected from wet winter soil) and re-grow from a thick, woody taproot or tuber.

Even in the northern areas, you can carefully dig up these tubers after a killing frost and store them for the winter like you would for Dahlias. This root will re-grow in your garden, and next summer's plants will become HUGE and covered with thousands of sweetly scented blossoms!

You can find seeds in many seed catalogs but not in garden centers. I have never seen plants offered as well.

# Nemesia

## Nemesia hybrida



Each year, these colorful annuals appear more often in garden centers. They have been around for several years, but recently, people began to pay attention to them.

Nemesia is native to the southern grassland areas of Africa and has large clusters of small to medium-sized, snapdragon-like flowers on the low-growing but bushy plants. They are hardy to zones 9 to 10. Still, appearances can deceive, for even though the plants look like a frost will kill them, they can survive temperatures well below freezing—for a while.

As for fragrance, the colorful flowers have a spicy lily or vanilla perfume, some very much so. In newer varieties, growers breed the flowers for largeness and especially for fragrance. The abundance of these sweetly scented blooms fills the air with their fragrant aroma when the sun hits the flowers.

You can grow these in patio containers, hanging baskets, or in front of a border. They prefer full sunlight to partial shade and fertile, well-drained soil to thrive and bloom. New hybrid types are more heat, high-humidity, and cold-tolerant than old seed-grown varieties.

Choosing which varieties to recommend can be challenging, for they sell new, colorful hybrids to the public each year. My advice is to visit your garden center to sniff them out or perform an internet search for the best fragrant varieties now available.

# Petunia

## *Petunia exserta*



I mentioned in the Introduction the abundance of, in part, petunias offered in nurseries and garden centers to cover the mass of beds and borders worldwide. But... I (and you) must admit there are some new varieties with psychedelically wild petal colors with contrasting white or colorful spots, splotches, and stripes.

Growers breed these new varieties yearly, and garden centers can't meet customers' demands. The more wild and crazy the colors, the more they sell. And that's good! Find your extraordinary variety (well, make that plural—varieties) to highlight your flower bed, border, or container.

For this ebook, there is an even more unique type of petunia you need to grow – alone, all by itself, with no other varieties in the immediate area. How’s that for suspense?

In 1987, word spread worldwide about the discovery of a new *Petunia* species. In 2007, explorers traveled to southern Brazil and found only 14 plants of *Petunia exserta* (shown above). This rare species has bright red, star-shaped flowers highlighted with bright yellow pollen on its anthers.

Seeds collected from these wild plants can now be grown for your garden. This is ironic because the wild plants are slowly disappearing in their native environment—not from over-exploitation, but from natural causes. This species gradually interbreeds with other nearby *Petunia* species and will phase itself out of existence. Mother Nature is allowing this petunia to commit species suicide. Well, not on our watch — as usually stated when push comes to shove.

This petunia should be in a suicide prevention program — immediately! That program can be your garden, where you can keep it growing, blooming, and self-sustaining its individual genome via its seeds. It can genetically sustain itself only if you grow no other petunia varieties in your gardens.

More seed companies are slowly offering seeds of this species for home gardeners. I am still looking for plants available in garden centers. Hey, nursery people — get with the lifesaving species-saving program!

Grow this petunia and all others in full sun on well-drained, fertile soil. Their bright red flowers will make a neighborhood admiring bedding or border display.

Let’s all help save *Petunia exserta*!

# Phygелиus – Cape Fuchsia

## Phygелиus capensis



Here is one colorful plant you will most likely not find in any garden center or nursery, at least not yet. Although it resembles a fuchsia bush, it is not related. Surprisingly, it's more related to Foxglove and Penstemon flowers.

Native to South Africa, it grows as a semi-evergreen shrub there. It grows as a tender perennial (Zone 7 and higher) or an annual for most locations elsewhere. The deep pink or reddish-orange flowers are tubular, with the interior of the petals being bright yellow. Clusters of these blossoms hang downward from tall stems (inflorescences). You need to look upward to see that vivid yellow interior. Mother Nature should lift those blossoms up more, but she must know better.

The only way to obtain this plant is by growing it by seed, which is easy to germinate. A solitary problem exists in finding those seeds. The best way to locate a supplier is to do an internet search of this plant. I accidentally came across it and became captivated by the descriptive beauty of these flowers and the guarantee that the neighborhood hummingbirds would flock to the plants throughout the summer. It's true! I had plenty of these excited avian visitors during this time. Even they thought this was a novel plant to quench their thirst for nectar.

This plant enjoys the requirements of fertile, well-drained soil and plenty of sunlight. Although it grows best in a bedding or border location, the next best situation is raising it in containers—which I did — but my plants grew less tall but remained bushy. Mature plants in warmer climates can reach from three to five feet. That is something worth seeing and admiring!

Potted plants will regrow from the woody stems by late spring if protected from freezing conditions over the winter. If transplanted to a flowerbed, you can be assured of a larger display of these intriguing, colorful blossoms throughout the summer.

# Pimpernel – Blue Pimpernel; Italian Pimpernel

**Anagallis monellii “Skylover”**



In 1905, Baroness Emma Orczy (her full name was Emma Magdalena Rozália Mária Jozefa Borbála Orczy de Orci — (yikes, no wonder she shortened it) wrote and published a historical book about the Reign of Terror at the start of the French Revolution entitled *The Scarlet Pimpernel*.

The main character, a flamboyant Englishman named Sir Percy Blakeney, acts like a Zorro superhero by rescuing people sentenced to death via “Madam Guillotine.” He is a master of disguise and escapes death-defying encounters.

He adopts a red flower, *Anagallis arvensis*, better known as a scarlet pimpernel, as his secret identity “nickname” — just like Spiderman, the Green Hornet, and Batman are today. Sir Percy would have made a bigger or more powerful statement of his hero status if he had used *Anagallis monellii* or the Blue Pimpernel instead.

This plant is a traffic-stopper in full bloom, with hundreds of intense, ultra-true-blue flowers for the entire summer. A native of the Mediterranean region, we can classify it as a maintenance-free plant, for it can grow well in dry, sunny locations. It would appreciate some fertile, well-drained soil with an occasional watering for better growth and bloom, but don't fuss over it.

Look for the “**Skylover Blue**” variety (an ideal name!), which grows only a foot tall, branches off in all directions, and makes an outstanding border, bedding, and container plant. If only it were hardy—only to Zone 9—but it is an annual in most gardens.

All superheroes have minor character flaws; this prolific bloomer is no exception. Like its close cousin *Anagallis arvensis* mentioned above, both species close their petals at dusk, when the day is cloudy, or when a thunderstorm nears. Both species have the common nickname of Poor Man's Barometer. These plants prefer to bask in the bright sunlight. Then again, don't we all?

# Portulaca – Moss Rose

## Portulaca grandiflora



Let's say your garden soil is sunbaked, sandy, gravelly, or chunky with stones. What could grow well in those less-than-ideal conditions that would not require constant irrigation and full-time maintenance? Well, some plants listed in this ebook will work, but here is one of the easily overlooked annuals that can thrive and bloom non-stop for you.

Native to South America, specifically to Uruguay, Brazil, and Argentina, Portulaca grows as a groundcover with small succulent leaves. This absorbent nature is critical for their survival in those inhospitable, hot, dry places. This does not mean they can behave like cactus plants, for they need occasional watering, but you can save on your water bill growing these gorgeous plants.

They detest growing in heavy-clay-based soil, for clay can retain water too long and rot the roots and stems. If your soil is mainly clay, take the time (and, yes, some work) to add plenty of coarse sand. Come to think of it — this would be good when planting all the other flowers and vegetables in a garden. Respect your soil; it's the most essential thing concerning gardening!

Portulaca's common name explains everything about them — they look like moss. Still, the flowers appear as single to semi-double petal roses. Their colors range from white, red, rose pink, orange, yellow, and a slew of bicolors with streaks and stripes. They will bloom all summer and into the fall and self-seed plenty, so expect new plants each year.

After the last frost of spring, sprinkle seeds across the tilled soil and either water or let the rain settle them into place. Then, it is a waiting game to enjoy their beauty.

Each summer, I will drive by a home with a long driveway with a separate entrance and exit way. Each area contains flower beds showcasing these gorgeous plants. I never see if someone waters them, for the house is about a half-mile away. Who wants to carry water that distance? So, these plants are at the mercy of Mother Nature to give them a drink, but they thrive — each year!

Go wild and crazy by sowing these seeds in your rock garden, edges of sidewalks, or other areas that prove difficult to grow many other flowers.

**Ptilotus – Pink Mulla Mulla; Lambs  
Tails; Pink Pussy Tails; 'Joey'  
Ptilotus exaltatus “Joey Improved”**



Who could not resist growing an Australian native flower named “Pink Mulla Mulla”? Well, I couldn’t, and I am glad I grew it. My sister also fell in love with it and wishes to grow it yearly.

There are several ways to describe the flower head of this unique annual. Including the above common names, you could describe it as Pink Cat Tails, Pink Spruce Trees, Pink Pinecones, or, as my sister crudely remarked (jokingly), Pink Toilet Brushes. Older gardeners may also call it Pink Bottle Brushes. Does anyone use this tool anymore?

Anyway, when viewed up close, those eye-catching, if not unbelievable, four-inch-long flower heads are composed of several tiny tubular flowers with vivid neon-pink ends. They separate each other with whitish woolly, fuzzy, fluffy, or spiderweb-ish fibers. The cottony effect looks gray or pale purple in bright sunlight punctuated with laser-like pink dots. The green leaves eventually form reddish stems topped with those conical, if not comical, flower heads.

I hope I conveyed this description adequately to you. If not, zoom in on the above photo. Even the honeybees and smaller bumblebees were confused about these flowers. They eventually liked them, for they constantly sipped the nectar all summer and into the fall.

This plant grows in central Australia's hot and arid regions and, surprisingly, is related to Celosia, described earlier. Although it grows as a perennial there, it is more of an annual for most gardens elsewhere.

The plants need full sunlight to grow and bloom well for all container and bedding purposes, and the soil must be exceptionally well-drained. The plants thrive in occasional forgetfulness in watering but will perish in constantly watered soil. As for fertilization, incorporate some time-released granules into the ground.

Look for the variety called "**Joey Improved.**" This plant is very low-maintenance, for you do not have to trim back any side shoots or spent flowers; they keep growing from the top of each cone-shaped flower head while the bottom actually "spent" blossoms blend in with all the other clusters of flowers. Allow the flower heads to keep growing and, hopefully, form seeds.

As a floral newcomer to most gardeners (when writing this ebook), the seeds are expensive and have a low germination rate. Breeders are currently working on improving those two problems.

This annual is perfect for growing if you wish to impress the know-it-all garden club members or competitive neighbors. They won't know how to react to these unusual flowers and will be persistent in questioning

you about them. Just smile and keep them curious. You have finally earned some praise and respect.

# Salpiglossis – Painted Tongue

## *Salpiglossis sinuata*



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 the formation of this outstanding flower, you are also correct. This annual garden plant provides petunia-like, flamboyant, outlandish, and exceptionally colorful flowers. Think of it as the result of what happens when a petunia goes wild with unbelievable colors.

Introduced from the southern Chilean Andes Mountain range regions 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 the best types have contrasting colors or overlaid with geometric patterns and veins. They are wickedly gorgeous, like stained glass etched or overlaid with shining gold.

One complaint I have with *Salpiglossis* (not of its making) is its horrible nickname. 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 undoubtedly name it better than I can.

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, ensure the plants grow in fertile, 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 I advise you not to purchase the “mixed-seed” option; flower color from mixes can be disappointing and distracting. Always buy the named varieties, such as “**Kew Blue**,” from the world-famous Kew Gardens in England. This variety should be your first choice to grow in your garden if you love blue or purple flowers. The outer regions of each flower are dark blue but become almost black towards the center. The bright yellow anthers

offer a perfect focal point. This plant is the best-known and grown Salpiglossis variety.

Salpiglossis '**Red Bicolor**' and '**Royale Purple Bicolor**' (shown above) are other beautiful varieties, flaunting velvety-red or vibrant purple blooms highlighted with molten gold centers and veins. They are all "hot-hot-hot" flowers for your cool-looking (as in a great-looking) garden.

# Scabiosa – Pincushion Flower

## *Scabiosa atropurpurea*



This constant blooming annual will supply you with plenty of summer flowers. Not only does it flaunt colorful petals, but it also provides plenty of nectar for the neighborhood butterflies.

*Scabiosa* will also provide desperate small-talk material when trapped with neighbors, family members, or friends after discussions of work, sports, politics, and the weather become depleted. Here, you tell them this annual has blooms resembling pincushions — which prompts you to explain what a pincushion is and its function.

Afterward, you can lecture them about this plant's Latin generic name, which refers to the medical condition called scabies, in which tiny mites

burrow under the skin's epidermis. Talking about parasites will always liven up a conversation. You will then enlighten them that this plant does not attract skin mites, but rubbing the leaves on the skin helps ease the constant itchiness caused by them.

Congratulations if you have made it this far in talking about this plant, for it is rare to engage in a candid, one-sided discussion about botanical names and histories. I bore most people to tears about such talks, but you're a gardener, and such things interest you (and me).

Oh well, I thought you would be itching to know more about this flower, so let's return to its culture. It is easy to plant in any garden from sown seed or transplants. Most selections are of mixed colors. However, you can get separate colors from online seed catalogs, including the popular "almost black" flower color. Plant them in full sunlight and well-drained soil. Please don't fuss over soil fertility; less-than-ideal conditions are best for plant growth and bloom.

Most growers recommend planting it with other taller growing annuals to act as supports to prevent the flowers from flopping over. For gardeners in warmer climates, it can re-grow as a perennial and form larger plants by summer. That would be something to admire.

# Scaevola – Fanflower

## Scaevola aemula



If you are looking for a low-maintenance, long-blooming, colorful, and “unusually constructed” annual, Australian native Scaevola is sure to please. Its odd Fanflower nickname is accurate, for it does not display the typical rounded flower shape. All five petals are arranged in a two-dimensional arrangement like that of a hand-held paper fan.

Another unusual display is the plant growing more horizontally than vertically. The constant blooming shoots extend outward but only grow a foot upward. The effect is gorgeous in beds, borders, or a container. If you prefer a less sprawly plant, you can always clip the ends to encourage “fuller” horizontal growth.

The flower colors range from an eye-popping blueish-purple to cotton candy pink and white. All three colors perfectly complement each other.

Fanflowers prefer to grow in plenty of sunlight and the usual fertile, well-drained soil but tolerate hot locations and occasional drought conditions without showing excessive wilting stress. But maintain the occasional watering for more reliable constant summer blooming.

Seeds are sometimes offered for sale, but they take ages to germinate (long dormancy) and slowly develop into blooming adulthood. Fortunately, more and more garden centers offer young plants each spring. I guarantee you will fall in love with this outstanding annual, just like the bees and butterflies have!

# Strobilanthes – Persian Shield

## Strobilanthes dyerianus



Native to Myanmar (not Persia — someone did not know where they were, apparently), this tropical plant has dark green veins, while the leaves are glowing or shimmering blue and iridescent purple. If you grow this plant in fertile, well-drained soil in a partly sunny location, expect to be overwhelmed by the sheer intensity of this coloration. It is just the ticket to transform a bed, border, or container into sheer astonishment.

Have I made myself clear in pleasantly warning you of what to expect from this leafy plant? Good. I want you to experience “the unexpectedness” of growing and enjoying this leafy class act. It constantly grows more amazingly colorful leaves all summer.

The keyword is vegetative, for it will only bloom if your garden enjoys late fall and winter warmth. I am still determining the flowers' appearance since they never bloom for me. Oh well, bring a potted plant indoors by fall and keep it growing. Maybe by the winter, you will witness its blooming. Hey, something to look forward to!

Nurseries do not grow these plants from seed but from softwood cuttings stuck in pots. Because of this propagation method, their cost will be higher but not excessively expensive. If you enjoy growing and admiring them and wish to have more of them to grow next summer, learn how to take cuttings yourself in the fall and overwinter them indoors. Imagine a large border of these plants thriving next year!

Being tropical, these plants can tolerate wet soil (for a while) but prefer moist, well-drained, fertile loam. Their best leaf coloration occurs when grown in partly sunny locations but avoid constant sun or total shade exposure.

If you grow Coleus plants, treat these plants like them. They can grow tall, so periodically pinch back the growing shoots to induce plenty of branching side shoots. They look great in a garden setting and make splendid container plantings. What more can we ask for?

# Torenia – Wishbone Flower

## *Torenia fournieri*



Related to Snapdragons and Foxgloves and native to tropical Asia, these plants can provide a colorful show all summer in a partly shady garden. They grow well in moist, well-drained, fertile flower beds, containers, and hanging baskets. The plants rise to under a foot tall (possibly more) but become bushy over the summer with hundreds of blossoms.

The Gloxinia-like flowers are usually brightly bicolored or tri-colored of blue, purple, and yellow, along with contrasting throat colors. Another nickname for this plant is the “clown flower” because of these “circus” colors. The familiar “wishbone flower” nickname is for the two stamens fusing together in the interior center of each blossom. They look “somewhat” like a turkey wishbone.

If started early in the year, you can raise these plants from seeds (the more economical way) than purchasing plants. Garden centers and nurseries may provide them, but not in vast quantities as begonias or impatiens. This neglect is a shame, for these plants have great potential to offer more colors and enjoyment in all gardens.

Grow the **Summer Wave Bouquet Series** for their bold and beautiful colors. They grow well in any garden area—sun, shade, beds, or containers. Their colors range from blue-purple and pure yellow with white markings. Although Torenia prefers cool growing conditions (typical of the Snapdragon family), this series seems to grow well in hot and humid locations.

Another outstanding variety is “**Duchess Blue & White**,” with velvety purple-rimmed petals and white to powder-blue interior blossoms. A perfect splotch of yellow (called a nectar guide) makes these blossoms explode with brilliance.

Other members of the Duchess Series have rose-red, pink, pure white, and light-lavender colored flowers. Unlike the Summer Wave varieties, this series prefers to grow and bloom well in deep shade! Other colorful types are available — primarily by seeds instead of plants.

# Verbena

## Verbena hybrida



Verbenas have small, tubular flowers arranged into ball-like clusters produced throughout the summer and fall. Their leaves are dark green, highly resistant to mildew, and exhibit a vigorous spreading or trailing growth habit, making them suitable for ground cover.

Many colors are available, but the more noticeable ones are bi-colored, which provide an eye-catching spectacle all season long. Some outstanding varieties will provide you with the added bonus of fragrant flowers. For my nose, the scent resembles *Convallaria* or Lily-of-the-Valley. Please remember that the scented types are the exception to the rule, for many scentless varieties are usually available.

These popular plants prefer to grow in sunlight to partial shade and fertile, well-drained soil. They can be hardy perennials if you live in Zones 9 to 10, but we must accept them as annuals for most of us. They can be easily propagated by rooted cuttings. However, you can find sections with tiny rootlets pre-forming on the leafy stems.

These outstanding plants are usually considered low-maintenance, but for best floriferous results, it is best to occasionally cut off spent flower clusters and provide regular watering and fertilizing to provide all-summer enjoyment.

# Viola – Pansy

## Viola cornuta



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Violas and pansies are instantly recognizable for their small to large colorful petals with striped patterns or dark mirror-imaged “blotches,” which, in many people’s minds, are called “faces.” It resembles the Rorschach Inkblot Test used in psychology studies. The flower colors are all shades of the rainbow.

We consider these plants a conundrum; in some locations, they grow as an annual, biennial, or short-lived perennial. It depends on your growing zone and how severe the winter temperature is. Gardening is always a “cross your fingers and hope for the best” adventure.

As with most, if not all, violas prefer to grow and bloom prolifically in cool weather. That is why they are predominantly displayed in most garden centers in the spring. Try as you might, you can't resist the urge to purchase a few plants to satisfy that need for something colorful at that time. Unfortunately, they begin to suffer by summer, especially during those hot and humid days.

Violas have always been a popular flower for people to grow. So much so that they spurred some enterprising gardeners to dabble in crossbreeding species and varieties to form new types. Throughout the 19th century, gardeners and growers competed with each other to hybridize outstanding new, wildly colorful varieties.

Eventually, consumer demand for these new varieties took hold, and seed companies soon began developing new strains — which brings us to the many colorful types sold today. Go to any nursery or garden center and see what those early hybridizers could only imagine.

Since we are concentrating on the most unique and astounding annual flowers, I have to include here two types of *Viola cornuta* that are eye-catching, amazing, and defy credibility. They grow best in sunny areas, thriving in fertile, well-drained, humusy soil. You must grow these plants by seed (or, if lucky, find plants in a nursery or garden center) to experience their colorful grandeur. Can I state any more flamboyant descriptive words for these plants? Definitely, yes, but I will let you be the judge by adding more.

First to praise is *Viola cornuta* **'Tiger Eye'** and **'Tiger Eye F1 Mix'** shown above. There appears to be some confusion about whether they are one and the same or as a bonafide hybrid strain. Either way, you must admit that the petal color and markings are fascinating. The petal color is shades of yellowish-brown, like a type of mustard. The stylized loops and parallel petal lines look like they are drawn with a magic marker pen. Thus, the floral interpretation of tiger stripes. I can't resist adding another descriptive word for this Viola by paraphrasing Tony the Tiger, "It's gr-r-reat!"



Another attention-getter is “**Brush Strokes,**” where each flower has different shades of color but is highlighted by contrasting colors of blurred lines, streaks, and splotches. They appear, aptly named, like an artist paint-slashing and splashing the petal canvas with a brush. Each petal is uniquely colored and designed. Think of a Van Goth or Picasso masterpiece not on canvas but on silky petals.

The above two varieties represent violas considered **Historical Florist Pansies** or **Antique Pansies** due to their fantastic color patterns. They represent a time when floral novelty was the rage and gardeners (usually in private) felt slightly rebellious over social conformity. That same behavior still thrives today, no matter what plant you insert into fertile soil. Hopefully, that plant is something different and exciting from commonly grown types. Novelty is the spice of life for any home gardener.

# Conclusion

I heard excellent advice from a teacher eons ago who said if you become bored or depressed by what you do, it's time to consider a new way of thinking and doing. He explicitly advised on building a satisfying career and future plans. Surprisingly, his advice can even imply how we garden and the reasons for doing it.

I have no proof, only a "feeling," that the longer we garden, there will come a time when the activity drags, the plants available appear lackluster, and the unfortunate result is to possibly consider ending this activity. Hopefully, this attitude is temporary and not permanent.

Flower and vegetable gardening is a cathartic activity to purge our daily chaotic thoughts and actions. We strive to have individualistic ideas and interests in a society of conflicting beliefs and behaviors. Gardening will always be a silent rebellion against dogmatic societal consistency and conformity.

You can always form a garden different from everyone else. Find something exciting to grow, get your hands dirty, and enjoy the unexpected beauty that follows. Creativity is always an enjoyable but personal matter.

*"But let us cultivate our garden."*

— Voltaire (1759), *"Candide"*

*"Gardeners have unique preferences, which tend to reflect dramas in their personal lives, but they all share a love of natural beauty and a passion to create order, however briefly, from chaos. The garden becomes a frame for their vision of life."*

— Diane Ackerman, *"Cultivating Delight: A Natural History of My Garden"*

May your vision of life be happy and beautiful, filled with a garden of fabulous flowers. That makes you a fantastic person!

# **Thank you for reading this ebook**

There are many more unusual annuals and perennials “somewhere” available to include in your private or “secret” garden. Part of the enjoyment is hunting for them; your best method is through the internet.

I have written other ebooks highlighting other unique plants rarely found in garden centers. The information presented here is more updated than in those previously published ebooks. Still, many other unusual plants (perennials, shrubs, and vines) are listed in the other publications.

Please visit my author website, <https://gedwinvarner.com> , concerning my other gardening ebooks and 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 experience and learning led him to receive a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology with a minor in Botany.

He successfully owned and operated a fragrant flower mail-order nursery for twenty years. 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.