

Must-Grow Garden Flowers

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Written by G. Edwin Varner.

Preface

This guide helps you learn and discover beautiful and unique plants for your flower garden. Many provide outstanding color, including some with delightful fragrances, for your garden. This ebook is not the definitive listing of all these types of plants.

The information on each plant may contain inaccuracies about their histories, growing conditions, and hardiness. Each plant has its USDA hardiness zones, best growth conditions, and my recommended varieties to find and grow. Please be aware these plants may not be available, discontinued or replaced for better varieties by nurseries.

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, public gardens, many nurseries within my area, and by Creative Commons (CC0) licensed images.

Introduction

There's never a dull moment in a flower garden!

Have you ever become bored over the constant offering of common flowering plants in garden centers? They sell monotonous varieties of impatiens, geraniums, petunias, and marigolds to gardeners each year. New gardeners may believe there is nothing else to grow in a flower garden. But, there are many other colorful, and fascinating flowers you can enjoy. It's time to be an adventurous gardener and discover these botanical treasures!

When first viewing these blossoms, they may not be too attractive, but they make observers stop and stare. Hey, that's what your gardens should do – give an observer a reason to stare instead of a passing glance. One way to engage surprises in a flower garden is to flaunt unusual floral colors. Expect the unexpected in flower petal coloration. Never underestimate what wild colorations can result from these unique flowers. The lesson here is for all gardeners to be daring in having and creating impressive, and fabulous floral displays.

This ebook explores the unusual and exciting flower species and varieties you can grow and enjoy. Many of these long-blooming flowers can grow in containers and placed somewhere to highlight their outstanding beauty. Some plants have scented blossoms and offer alluring fragrances for most of the growing season. Admire their blossoms up close, and you will appreciate them even more. They are your must-find and must-grow-now garden flowers.

Be the envy of your gardening friends by growing these stunning and unusual plants. You may hear them say, "I must grow these flowers!"

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.

Abutilon – Flowering Maple

Abutilon hybridum



Well, at least we don't have to rake the leaves.

Although their common name says Maple, these tropical and semi-tropical, woody shrubs are in a different classification than a Maple tree. The leaves look similar to a Maple, but they are not related. These plants grow in the tropical areas of the Americas, Africa, Australia, and Asia. The standard type found in many larger garden centers is a hybrid of two or more species.

The flowers resemble a Mallow or a Hollyhock which is not surprising since they are all in the same family. Many varieties sport colorful three-inch diameter flowers either shaped like a lantern or opened into

a large cup. Known as Chinese Bellflowers or Chinese Lanterns, they can grow to over three feet tall and wide when grown outdoors in fertile, well-drained soil, and preferring as much sunshine as possible. When cultivated in a container, their size will be less. Cascading varieties can grow in large hanging baskets.

Considered as annuals, they are not hardy in most areas and need to grow in containers, if you wish to store them indoors for the winter. They have no significant disease or insect problems, but tiny beasties such as aphids, whiteflies, and those horrible web-making spider mites, can cause problems later in the summer or over winter.

Flowering Maples can grow from seed but as mixed colors. They grow slowly and most likely would not bloom before Autumn. Propagate named varieties by cuttings to keep their colorful uniqueness.

These plants were popular during the late 1800s, but attitudes changed, and they became less grown. Today, they can be difficult to find in many nurseries. But, fear not, for new generations of gardeners are seeing them in a new light, thanks, in part, to longer blooming, colorful hybrids. Why not try them?

Alcea – Hollyhocks

How to create vertical impressiveness.

A principal representative of the immense Mallow Family, Hollyhocks have grown in flower gardens for centuries. They grow tall, possibly overwhelming smaller gardens, but most can accommodate these enjoyable giants. Old-fashion cottage gardening embraced all sizes of flowering plants.

Today, we seem to avoid planting tall growing plants in favor of two-dimensional, low growing bedding flowers. Cottage gardening also stressed the diversity of flowers instead of single displays of one or two types of plants. It's time to change our gardening viewpoint and raise flowers at eye – instead of ankle or knee – level.

Okay, so which Hollyhock varieties can we ease ourselves into this old-style radical re-design of our gardens? Here are two types I feel are unique both in color and growth. They are easy to raise from seed and easy to command attention to show-off to your friends and neighbors.

Alcea rosea 'Queeny Series'



Although classified as biennials (growing from seed for the first year then blooming the second year), there is a time-delayed enjoyment. But, new varieties are now available to grow as annuals, such as the **Queeny Series**. They differ from regular Hollyhock varieties being bushy and smaller, averaging around two to three feet tall as compared to the usual five or six feet.

The Queeny Series has partially doubled, colorful flowers all along the stems. They can grow like annuals if seeds are sown indoors early in the year. The first blossoms are enjoyed about three months later after being planted outside in your flower beds or borders. They can tolerate light spring frosts, but some protection is recommended.

The flower colors range from dark rose, wine-purple, light yellow, pale pink and pure white. Because the plants grow small, they can be raised in containers and still bloom throughout the summer. Hollyhocks in pots – who would believe it? Can this variety regrow the following

year? Possibly, but not likely. Each flower produces many seeds and weakens the plant for winter survival – just like it's taller growing brethren. But, it's worth a chance, isn't it?

Seeds are available in many garden centers and online seed companies.

Alcea rosea 'Nigra' – Black Hollyhock



This plant is a classic, and an unusual (and beloved) old-timer biennial variety with 'almost-black' single petals. When back-lit by sunlight, they are a dark maroon-purple but, when shined upon they look black, especially when viewed in cloudy weather or partly shady areas.

The whole plant is impressive with flower spikes towering to eight feet tall. The blossoms may last one day (as usual for the Mallow family), but new ones flower from early to late summer. Allow a few seeds to self-sow for next summer's enjoyment.

Seeds are available in many garden centers.

Alonsoa – Mask Flower

Alonsoa meridionalis



The best descriptive word for this plant is 'beautiful.'

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 there. If you live in zone 9 or higher, it can be a perennial for you. 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 regular Snapdragons though it's difficult to see the resemblance. The one-inch red flowers are lovely, and if you adore them so do the hummingbirds. The leaves are dark green, and the blossoms held above them by slender stems. They 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. By mid to late summer they can look messy, but don't worry, clip them back by half, and within two weeks, they are re-blooming.

Sow seeds indoors about six to eight weeks before the expected last spring frost but transplant them outdoors after the frost danger has passed.

Seeds and plant are difficult to find, but large online nurseries specializing in rare plants may have them available.

Alstroemeria – Peruvian Lily

Alstroemeria species and hybrids



This flower helps keep florists in business.

This tender perennial is not a true lily, but the exotic-looking blossoms resemble one. Many of you may not recognize these plants, but if you visit your local florist, you will see what the typical flower looks like before growing them in your garden. They have bright colors of yellow, orange, white, pink or red with a contrasting yellow throat splashed with purple-brown streaks or spots on each petal. Some species have stunningly beautiful pale lavender-purple petals.

Breeders are trying to establish better winter hardiness since these plants are native to tropical locations of South America. Although the

proposed northern survival limit is zone 7, gardeners will still need to plant it deeper in sandy soil and at a southern exposure.

They grow well in full sun to partial shade in well-drained, sandy soil with plenty of added organic compost. Mulch well to protect the roots from the extremes of summer and winter temperatures. The height is approximately 30 inches and space plants one foot apart. You can plant them in large containers, and I highly recommend this for colder climate gardeners to hold overwinter in the home.

Alstroemeria spreads by underground swollen roots or rhizomes, but when established, they can be brittle so avoid transplanting them. They make long-lasting cut flowers (that's why florists love them) and bloom for several weeks beginning in the early summer. These plants are rarely offered except in larger garden centers.

Anemone – Japanese Anemone or Windflower

While strolling in the park one day...

On one of those delightful, sunny, crispy-cool Autumn days while leisurely strolling in a public garden I came across these eye-catching perennials. "What in the world?" I thought. "I don't recognize these flowers." My first guess was late-blooming Dahlias but, no, they were something different. Later, after searching through many gardening catalogs, I discovered they were Japanese Anemones. They became a 'must-grow' flower for my garden the following spring.

There are Anemones for every growing season, but the ones I encountered are Japanese Anemones which bloom from late summer through the fall until mass plant murderer Jack Frost arrives. Although native to China, the Japanese grew and bred them for hundreds of years. During this time, they created many varieties – not so much in different colors but in size, floral form and bloom time. These flowers only display in shades of pink, pale lavender and white but their form is exquisitely perfect.

If you want plenty of contrasting vivid colors, Chrysanthemums also bloom now, but Anemones grow taller, bushier and command attention. They are also much hardier than Chrysanthemums; zones 4 or 5 to 8, depending on the variety. "Mums" are always chancy in their hardiness and winter survivability.

These plants prefer to grow in partly sunny locations with very fertile, well-drained soil. They can tolerate full sunshine but will suffer in hot, dry soil. Always make sure the soil is moist during periods of drought.

I could not determine the identity of these perennials for I never find them offered in garden centers or nurseries in the spring. Then again, I rarely find Chrysanthemums either. Fall blooming plants always get a

'bum rap' in not being offered for spring sales in nurseries. A far better reliable method to get plants is by mail-order nurseries.

Here are two beautiful varieties you should find and grow in your garden.

Anemone x hybrida 'Honorine Jobert'



This beautiful cultivar is a lovely antique or heirloom variety (1858) growing up to four feet tall with several two to three-inch, pure white blossoms with vivid yellow stamens. The petals have a lovely satiny sheen which dares you not to glance but gaze at the flowers.

This variety is very cold hardy but suffers (as most other Japanese Anemones) in hot regions. It blooms for several weeks beginning in midsummer to supply you with several long-stemmed cut-flower for your home. Not sure you should grow this in your garden? Well, it made

the 2016 Perennial Plant Association “Plant of the Year” award if that helps your decision. Where have you been all my gardening-life
Honorine Jobert?

Anemone tomentosa ‘Robustissima’ or Anemone vitifolia ‘Robustissima’



There is some confusion about which is the correct species name, but there is no doubt concerning how wonderful this variety is for any garden. I particularly like the *vitifolia* species name for the Latin name matches the common name of this cultivar – the “Grape Leaf Anemone.”

This robust plant can grow to four feet tall and is very bushy with silvery-rosy-pink flowers produced continuously from midsummer until a killing frost.

Angelonia

Angelonia angustifolia



A plant to give Snapdragons an inferiority complex.

Another relative of our common snapdragon, this beautiful plant is from Mexico to Argentina. Because it looks like small snaps, gardeners call them “summer snapdragons.” I know, this can become somewhat of a confusing issue when discussing garden flowers.

Moving on, these plants, in their native areas, are perennials but elsewhere they are fast-growing annuals. Angelonias first appeared in garden centers in the late 1990s. They were spindly things with unattractive, wide-spaced flowers, but they had significant improvement potential — which happened.

The flower colors are in the blue to purple shades but may have pink to white petals. Some add attractive bi-coloring. One remarkable quality of these plants is the foliage, when handled, smells of apples or grapes! They are long blooming, make good container subjects and cut flowers. They grow well in full sunlight and well-drained, fertile soil. Treat them like regular snapdragons, and they will never disappoint your enjoyment.

Landscapers love their heat and drought tolerance and long blooming. In 2008, *Better Homes and Gardens* magazine listed this plant as one of their top 20 choice annuals to grow in all gardens. Feel more confident in growing this plant?

There are a few imperfections though. Seeds are rarely available, and garden centers sell vegetative-produced, named-variety plants. It's expensive to plant a bed of these flowers, but cheer up; seed-grown cultivars are now available to the public. The trouble is, seeds take months to germinate. That's troubling, but a few new strains are becoming available each year.

An outstanding seed-grown variety now available (at the time of this writing) is the **Serena Series**, found in many garden centers. The future looks bright for these new and exciting annuals for our gardens.

Arctotis – Blue-Eyed Daisy

Arctotis grandis



You can also make a fashionable daisy-chain necklace.

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 the petals 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 are tender perennials. 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. If you planted

this for evening garden enjoyment, you would be very disappointed. Unlike most other daisies, this species closes its flowers for the night and reopens them at dawn. It must feel the evening chill and wraps 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. By doing so, you make it create more flowers and form a better-looking plant. Speaking of which, try to grow many plants – one or two does not give a great 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 growing!

Asclepias – Mexican Milkweed

Asclepias curassavica



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Blood out of a turnip, milk out of a weed.

Another common name for this plant is “Mexican Bloodflower.” Not all members of the Milkweed family are hardy perennials; some are tropical and grow as annuals. This colorful, frost-tender plant, is more of a tropical species but raised anywhere. You should sow seeds eight weeks before the last spring frost date and grow best in full or partial sunlight and in well-drained, fertile soil. Look for the varieties called **Silky Gold** or **Silky Red** (or color name variations starting with Silky) at garden centers.

Mature plants can grow to over three feet tall and wide. It possesses all the typical characteristics of the hardy Milkweeds such as having the milky latex sap that bleeds out from an injured part of the plant.

It also attracts the Monarch Butterflies (*Danaus plexippus*) as a food resource for the larval stages of its life-cycle, which may pose a potential problem. Should we plant these species in the southern part of the United States? Hey, why not? If it provides food for the butterfly's young would that be ideal for helping the butterfly survive? Yes, but also a no. In the southern states, these plants grow longer into the late Fall. The butterflies lay their eggs on the plants in hopes for a new generation to develop. But the butterflies need to travel into the central part of Mexico for wintering-over until Spring. If many butterflies do not complete the rest of this journey, they will succumb to winter cold – even in the southern parts of the USA. Keep this in mind if you live in the southern states and wish to grow these flowers. Grow other nectar-rich flowers to help give these butterflies the energy to complete this fantastic journey.

Try getting seeds from companies that sell rare seeds.

Browallia

Browallia speciosa or Browallia americana



Valuable jewels growing in your valuable garden.

Although classified as a tropical plant, Browallia is an annual in most gardens. It was first discovered growing in South America by Johan Browallius (1707-1755), a Swedish botanist, bishop, and physician. 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 for the star-shaped petals are vivid blue or purple, and white. Easy to grow from seeds sown in the early spring, they will grow and bloom by midsummer.

Sensitive to frost, raise these plants as annuals in beds or containers. They can also make an indoor 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. In garden beds, they can grow up to two feet tall and wide and produces blossoms all summer long. When grown in containers, clip them back to control their height. As with most other outdoor plants, whiteflies, aphids, and other pests love it as much as we do.

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.

Calibrachoa

Calibrachoa species hybrids



Flowers the Lilliputians would love to grow.

This plant is the new annual kid on the block related to Petunias. The resemblance is uncanny and is often mistaken for mini-petunias – which are in a different family.

They are one of the new bedding plants offered by larger garden centers but are still uncommon in many locations. These plants are native to the open grasslands of Brazil, Chile, Peru, and Argentina along with wild petunias. They even grow alongside them. Discovered at the same time as petunias (early to mid-19th century), they never gained

notoriety until the 1990s. Most of the attention went toward Petunias for their larger sized flowers.

Calibrachoa has a multitude of small blossoms giving it the nickname of “Million Bells.” For most of flower gardening history, larger flowers 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 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. Also, these plants can have bright, splashy, contrasting colors. Some varieties have double petals and resemble tiny roses. Also (again), unlike pampered petunias, these plants can tolerate drier growing conditions. Unlike petunias, these plants produce few seeds, and this is a limiting factor in raising them in bulk by garden centers. This 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. 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 sell the plants.

Catharanthus – Annual Vinca or Madagascar Periwinkle

Catharanthus roseus; formerly Vinca rosea



Some like it hot.

Why is this plant not grown more often? It loves to grow in hot conditions, full sunlight and tolerates dry soil. It also provides prodigious amounts of colorful flowers above glossy green foliage all summer long. Maybe the reason for this unfortunate overlook is we try to avoid growing beautiful flowers in sun-burning hot, dry soil. Few plants appreciate those conditions – I know I avoid planting my flowers in such places.

Growing to less than two feet tall and wide, Vinca blooms well in a bed or in containers. By planting them in the fertile and well-drained soil, you do not have to worry about the occasional dry-out of the soil. As long as they receive plenty of sunlight during the day, they will bloom well.

Annual Vinca is native to the island nation of Madagascar which explains why it loves all things hot and dry. Although the name is similar, gardeners should not confuse it with the perennial, sky-blue flowered groundcover called Vinca or Periwinkle (called *Vinca minor*.)

The flower color of Annual Vinca ranges from shades of 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.

Don’t plan to sample any, but, the sap from this plant is very poisonous. However, within this sap are chemicals that show promising results to kill cancer cells – like leukemia cancer. Who knows what medical miracles this and other garden flowers can cure!

Annual Vincas can be a challenge to find in commercial garden centers. You may have better luck by visiting smaller nurseries which are not afraid to grow unusual plants. You can find seeds in more massive seed catalogs, but raising these plants from seeds may prove difficult. The germination and growing conditions need to have constant warm and moist soil. Cold temperatures only delay germination and stunts seedling growth. If you can locate well-grown young bedding plants (sold in plastic 4-packs) latch on to them. These plants are well worth growing!

Ceratotheca – South African Foxglove

Ceratotheca triloba



Enjoy your place in the sun while you can.

Not related to the biennial foxglove (*Digitalis*), this curious plant has similar-shaped blossoms, only more substantial, but not as colorful. The

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 can grow to over six feet tall, in a flower bed, but when grown in a large container it will be half that size. Plant it in full to partial sunlight, fertile and well-drained 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, for some unexplained reason, the plant never became well-known to American gardeners. In Victorian England, it became the rage in British gardening society and later on... forgotten. Just like the adage, here today – gone tomorrow. Growing it must have been a ‘fad,’ and afterward, gardeners became obsessed with other 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 larger British seed companies will have seeds available. Don’t worry, for this plant is easy to grow from seed and raise to enjoy eye-catching, beautiful flowers.

Coreopsis – Tickseed

I feel the need to wear a flea and tick collar while gardening.

Sometimes, a family of flowering plants gets shoved out of popularity. Once widespread, some plants can become mediocre and later become forgotten. These colorful and long blooming plants once graced flower beds and borders but became eclipsed by the rise of our common bedding plants. Maybe it was due to Coreopsis being taller growing plants, their heritage stems from tall prairie plants. These colorful annual and perennial plants are now treated as valuable, and attractive flowers to grace any garden.

Being a vibrant-colored member of the daisy family, it gets its unusual nickname of tickseed due to having its seeds resembling blood-engorged ticks. Oh, that's sick! The things people imagine is borderline disturbing. Let's concentrate on those stunning flowers instead of reaching for a can of bug spray.

By some accounts, there are over 80 species of Coreopsis. About half are native to the prairie areas of the entire central length of North America. The other half are native to regions in Central and South America. With these species, breeders have been very busy creating colorful hybrids. Varieties now found in garden centers have stunning red, pink, orange, and vibrant yellow petals with additional bi-colors, bizarre stripes, and splotches – all on plants ranging in different heights. Most bloom all summer if planted in full sunlight, and fertile, well-drained soil.

Let's look at an old, but still popular annual species, *Coreopsis tinctoria* or the **Plains Coreopsis**.

Coreopsis tinctoria



Tall growing to over three feet, it sports a multitude of eye-catching bright yellow daisies with bright brownish-red centers. You will always find new plants sprouting each spring.

***Coreopsis lanceolata* 'Early Sunrise'**



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

This plant is a perennial species/variety having pure yellow, double flowers. It grows shorter and bushier than others of its kind. They make excellent cut flowers for your home.

Coreopsis verticillata 'Threadleaf Coreopsis'



This is also a perennial species. Still offered by nurseries, a variety called **Zagreb** (named after the Croatian capital of Zagreb), has a mass of thread-like, dark green foliage. Single-petaled, bright yellow blossoms cover the plant most of the summer. It is hardy to Zone 4. My one neighbor has clusters of these plants thriving for over 15 years.

Another newer variety is **Bengal Tiger** (shown below) having vivid yellow blossoms streaked with bright red.



There is an unfortunate fault with all the perennial varieties. That fault lies with their lack of hardiness. Although several new cultivars are hardy to zone 5 and more, they may only live for two years. Coreopsis dislikes clay-based soils and prefers more sandy or gravelly medium. The leading killer of perennial plants is excessive water retention in the ground during the winter. Too much water (and ice) will kill the central growth crown.

Another problem for some varieties is excessive seed production. With all those flowers formed over the summer, the resultant abundance of seeds robs the plant of vital energy to store for the coming winter. For gardeners wanting longer-lasting plants, excessive seed production is a nuisance. Even for annual species and varieties, prodigious amounts of new seedlings will emerge each spring and need to be weeded out. Clip off spent flower stalks during the summer to control excess seed production.

Dianthus – ‘Rainbow Loveliness’

Dianthus superbis hybrid



Somewhere over the rainbow, these lovely flowers bloom.

Members of the Carnation family come in all shapes, sizes, and colors. Many are perennials in warmer climates but best treated as annuals in freezing locations. Some, like this species, are short lived-perennials for they self-seed prolifically and weaken their chances to live another year.

This is a plant you need 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. Garden writer and author, Rosemary Verey, in her book ***The Scented Garden***, 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?

Single, fringed or feathery, wild-looking flowers cover 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.

One drawback with all these flowers is they produce a tremendous number of seeds which forces the plants to stop making more flowers. After the main flush of bloom, clip off the spent flower stems, and this will make the plant produce more blossoms within a few weeks.

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

It is easy to grow from seed and found in many seed catalogs. I never see this plant offered in garden centers. Do yourself a favor and grow this incredible plant and prepare yourself for an enjoyable treat for your nose and eyes.

Digiplexis - 'Illumination Flame'

Digiplexis (species)



When science fiction becomes science fact.

Although the Latin name of this plant sounds like a serious medical condition affecting your hand or fingers, it is the combinational name of two types of related plants bred together. 'Digi' represents our common biennial Foxglove or *Digitalis* plant and 'Plexis' is short for *Isoplexis canariensis*, or the Canary Islands Foxglove. Genetically fused together, these two types of plants formed this intergeneric hybrid. It sounds like science fiction, but it is becoming more commonplace in creating new flowers.

This plant is not some weird GMO (genetically modified organism) science experiment but combining two "almost" related flowers and seeing what happens. And what happened was raising this beautiful plant! It is one of those "WOW!" types of utterances when viewing these showy flowers for the first time. I can attest to using that word when I first observed this plant at a public garden in 2016.

The overall structure of the plant resembles a Foxglove with tall and robust spikes of clustered tubular, interior-spotted flowers arising from a rosette of large leaves. The flowers, though, resemble more of the *Isoplexis* characteristics of being larger and having red, pink, orange and yellow colors. Being a 'man-made' genetic hybrid, this plant is sterile – unable to form seeds – and propagated by cuttings or tissue-culture.

In 2012, breeders unveiled this plant to the world and won the prestigious Plant of the Year Award at the Chelsea Flower Show. I can imagine hearing all those 'wows,' and OMG's highlighted with exclamation points. It took a while for in 2014 it "crossed the pond" into the United States. Cue more wows and OMG's.

Less hardy than our regular Foxglove plants to zones 8 to 11, many gardeners will have to treat this plant as an annual. The plants can grow well in a large container – in fact, they look gorgeous doing so – and they can store over the winter this way. But, to have flowers for the following summer, the container-grown plant needs exposure to cold temperatures (32 to 45 degrees F.) for over a month to start the flowering response. Botanists call this process vernalization, just like exposing spring-blooming bulbs – such as tulips and daffodils – to cold conditions to form flower buds.

Although it produces no seeds, the spent flower spikes need clipping off to keep the plant blooming all summer. Okay, this is more of a 'hands-on' plant than most of your other flower bed inhabitants but it's worth the extra labor.

As a newcomer to the garden party, this hybrid should be one of those must-have growing plants for your garden. It responds well to growing in partly sunny locations and fertile, moist, well-drained soil.

Echinacea – Coneflower

Echinacea purpurea hybrids



Lovely scented Hedgehogs are in my garden.

The colorful varieties offered today are nothing like the ones grown in your grandmother's garden. Years ago, it was an under-appreciated wildflower-ornamental plant, but that has all changed. Hybridizers or plant breeders woke up to its exciting possibilities and made an excellent plant even better. There are several new varieties available for your garden based on new flower colors and fragrances not found in the older species-based plants. Be prepared to experience a whole new way to enjoy and grow these bone-hardy and dependable perennials.

Coneflowers thrive in the hot sun, dry soil and, for a short period, wet ground. Their large flowers bloom in late June and continue all summer. They will look rather untidy, so clip off spent flowers. They can grow to over two feet tall and are hardy from zones 3 to 10. Other qualities are being “butterfly magnets,” (attracting butterflies far and wide) and making excellent cut flowers for bouquets.

Echinacea derives its name from the Greek “echinos” meaning “hedgehog” for its spiky center cone. Be careful when smelling the sweet fragrance for those bristles are prickly to the nose. Ouch!! Although the colorful petals steal the floral show, these bristly cones have a lovely iridescence in the sunlight.

These plants are country wildflowers which have made it to the top of the perennial pop charts due to the popular notion that ‘medicinal’ extracts from them cures or prevents everything from the common cold to depression. I suggest growing these in your garden to enjoy their beauty; this helps more in easing the ‘blues.’

Okay, these flowers are gorgeous and fragrant – what do I recommend for you to grow in your garden? Get whatever colorful variety you can find! There are many outstanding cultivars offered it is challenging to narrow down one or two types. Many of these are available as plants by several mail -order nurseries and larger garden centers.

Try to avoid seed-grown strains for they revert to the species characteristics and lack the outstanding color and blossom shapes of the newer plants.

Fuchsia – Ladies Eardrops

Fuchsia magellanica 'Riccartonii'



I prefer the nickname “Angel’s Earrings”.

Have you ever thought to yourself wishing 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 type that can survive cold temperatures. The **Riccartonii** variety is also called the Hardy Fuchsia. 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) compared to 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 occurs 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, full sun, south-facing 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 my house's east-side foundation also greatly helps in their survival over a brutal winter.

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

I do not know why but most garden centers do not offer this plant. My best guess is, it is more profitable selling the hanging basket Fuchsias. 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 - "Atom"

Gladiolus primulinus



Atomic power for any garden.

There are many colorful varieties of Gladiolus for gardens. You name the color, and there is a variety of it and more! Are there green flowers or blue or even black? Well, sort of, for some varieties come very close to being those colors. But the type I highly recommend is called **Atom** (first raised in 1946.)

The height of the flower spikes is almost half the size of most other Gladiolus flowers – averaging nearly to 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 backlit 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.

You should be able to locate corms from specialty bulb nurseries on the Internet. Make sure to obtain plenty of corms (bulbs) and stagger planting them so you can enjoy this (and other varieties) over the entire summer.

Helianthus – Sunflower

Just when you've seen it all – you haven't.

Helianthus (or sunflowers) have had a long history with Man. Initially, they were only grown for the protein-rich seeds as food but also compressed for cooking oil. The flowers, much later on, were grown for their beauty in the garden. The typical bright yellow varieties now share our gardens with unusual colored varieties with reds, oranges and even pollen-less types for cutting. But they all share one quality – the ability to mimic the brilliance of the sun 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.” By advances in genetics, new pollen-less varieties have emerged on the gardening scene. They are developed to tap into the cut-flower market. Regular sunflowers tend to drop pollen onto tables. Sort of messy but I feel sorry for the bees searching for nectar and pollen while visiting the large flower-heads.

Flower color has also taken an enormous leap in creating many earth-shades – from classic yellow to white, orange, red, garnet-red to an almost black. I can't even describe all the variations of colors also created! One variety, **Ring of Fire**, is shown below.

“Ring of Fire” Sunflower



White petal varieties also command attention such as **Italian Ice** shown below:

'Italian Ice' Sunflower



And, for you Gothic gardeners, the near-black variety called **Moulin Rouge** will stop all car and foot traffic:

'Moulin Rouge' Sunflower



And for an extra flare why stop at flower color when those extra-large leaves and thick stems are shiny white. The *Helianthus argophyllus* variety called **Gold and Silver** has several golden-yellow heads and covered with silvery, furry foliage. Oh, it is stunning!

'Gold and Silver' Sunflower



There is a tremendous number of annual varieties (grown from seeds) available to gardeners. But, other breeding work continues with hardy perennial varieties. These plants have incorporated the hardiness genes from the wild-growing species native to North America.

Most of these species have the typical bright yellow, daisy-like flower structure. Some varieties have the flower structure like those of Chrysanthemums or Dahlias. A prime example is *Helianthus multiflorus* **Flore Pleno** which has double petals. A new, exciting type of this sunflower is shown below:

'Sunshine Daydream' Sunflower



Helianthus x multiflorus 'Sunshine Daydream' is a 2008 selected form of the 'Flore Pleno' hybrid of two species of Sunflowers. Wow, if this name does not make you stop and stare, the stunning flowers will. If you could only view the double, four-inch, bright yellow flowers of this variety, you might mistake it as being a dahlia or chrysanthemum.

Growing to a compact six feet tall, this sunflower is outstanding for its heavy blooming beginning in mid-summer. It is very hardy from zones 4 to 9 and makes a beautiful addition to a limited-space flower garden and for large containers. It will focus attention on your garden all summer. Being a complex hybrid, it is sterile and cannot form seeds. Your local larger garden centers should offer this plant for sale but, if not, many online mail-order nurseries provide it.

Viewing gorgeous, individual sunflowers in a garden or in a vase on the kitchen table is enjoyable but for sheer eye-popping amazement is to see hundreds. William Wordsworth may have bragged "*I saw a crowd, a host, of golden daffodils...*" but, excuse me sir, I saw an even more massive crowd of golden sunflowers!



One early October day while driving in the country, I drove around a bend and in this farm field were these flowers. I slammed on the breaks and stared at this glorious sight. Can you imagine how many were growing in this field? Countless, astronomical and a whole freaking lot of them! Always take a camera wherever you travel. You never know what can sneak up on you when you least expect it and demand a photo taken of it.

Hemerocallis – Daylily

Hemerocallis fulva pleno



Mission: Impossible (on deciding which Daylilies to grow.)

I was hesitant to include Daylilies in this ebook. Many beautiful varieties are available for you to grow in your garden. It's impossible to choose the rarest, most colorful or most fascinating of the types offered today. But, let me try to steer you toward an example. Let's look at one of the common species, *Hemerocallis fulva*, also known as tiger-lily, orange-daylily, tawny-lily, and ditch-lily.

Where I live, it grows (some foolish people say it is a weed) near roadside ditches and many smart homeowners have adopted it as an

easy bedding display. This specific daylily is the quintessential flower of summer.

There is a double petal variation of this species (***Hemerocallis fulva pleno***) which adds a touch of amazement when viewed up-close. This double-flowered daylily is beautiful!

Petal coloration always takes center stage in any garden. Daylilies are not hesitant to flaunt unusual colors and markings to get noticed.

Hibiscus

The devil is in the details.

Every flowering plant family has a few flamboyant members that flaunt their flowers either in size, color, and length of bloom. This group of plants is of no exception. Being part of the extensive Mallow family, they are tall-growing perennials or woody, tropical shrubs. For our purpose, we will concentrate on the hardy perennials for flower gardens. Do not confuse the colored tropical and semi-tropical hibiscus shrubs (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*) offered in many garden centers with the following (and other) perennials. Those tropical plants are sensitive to cold temperatures and need storing indoors over the winter.

As usual, with all members of this family, each Hibiscus blossom will only last one day (like Daylily flowers), but you may not notice this for so many blossoms bloom each day. The petals unfurl in their full glory during the day but by evening fold up into a cone and later drop off. They can be 'messy' for the daily-spent blossoms drop onto the ground. Rake the soil once a week to keep the surrounding area clean.

I must relate a true story that happened to my favorite Aunt one summer evening several years ago. She attended a swanky, outdoor garden party and wore a floral-print dress. To highlight her tropical looking attire, she secured two large, bright red hibiscus flowers by her ears. All was fine-and-dandy until that evening she noticed people were *"... looking at me strangely, pleasantly though, but with a strained smile or as if trying to hold back a fit of uncontrollable laughter."* On arrival home, she took off her earrings, looked into the mirror and was horrified to discover the two hibiscus flowers had folded up and appeared to look as reddish-black horns sticking symmetrically out of her head. She took her embarrassment in stride and laughed while telling her story. *"Oh well, some people think I am a 'she-devil.' At least I looked the part that evening!"*

The following varieties prefer to grow in full sunlight and fertile, well-drained soil. With all those flowers and foliage, make sure to water this

plant during extended dry spells.

Please note, the tall stems will die back to the ground by winter. Cut and discard the dead stems and apply mulch to protect the below-ground growth crown. New growth will return during the late spring ready to amaze you once again for another summer-filled extravaganza of fabulous flowers.

Hibiscus are forgiving plants but try to select the best growing locations to highlight their outstanding beauty. Due to their height and spread, they are best planted at the back of a border, in the center of an island flower bed or even as a hedge planting. They are also not bedding plants but as an accent or a brag-about “look what I grew” plant.

I recommend the following two unusual varieties to grow in your garden.

Hibiscus moscheutos 'Heartthrob'



Introduced in 2012, this zone 4 to 9 perennial has the darkest flowers available for a Hibiscus (as of this writing.) The 10-inch in diameter flowers are reddish-black with the unopened, glossy buds (or cones) 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. Like I mentioned earlier – Hibiscus are forgiving plants.

This variety is offered only as potted plants or dormant roots by larger garden centers and mail-order nurseries.

Hibiscus moscheutos 'Lord Baltimore'



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If you have the garden space and need something to show-off to your friends, the **Lord Baltimore** hibiscus is a must-grow-now plant.

Created by the hybridization of several related species in 1955, this hardy (zones 4 to 9) variety remains the best cultivar 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 dinner-plate-sized (up to 12 inches) bright, crimson-red flowers will cover this 'herbaceous shrub' all summer. Estimates of 300 large

flowers may appear on a well-grown plant over the course of a typical summer. Someone sure had plenty of time to spare counting 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 produce 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.

Impatiens – Touch-Me-Not or Busy Lizzie

Impatiens arguta, balfourii, balsamina, hawkeri, namchabarwensis, and niamniamensis



When boring becomes exciting in flower gardening.

Voted as one of the most popular of bedding flowers, the common *Impatiens walleriana* plants are long blooming providing lots of colors in shadier areas. They are also monotonous to cultivate in your garden. Each year, flower seed catalogs highlight new varieties (like new

models of cars) with catchy, glitzy names. Most lack any profound color differences. I will be a heretic and say, “They are boring!”

Impatiens are not your easiest of flowers to grow from seed. They can be a challenge, and that is why many gardeners prefer to purchase plants.

Research on breeding new hybrids of Impatiens began a few years ago. Many of these new hybrids involve the popular New Guinea Impatiens (*Impatiens hawkeri*) which tolerate more sunshine and can grow more extensive than regular Impatiens. They also provide better disease resistance and more vivid colors – not only to the flowers but some with their variegated leaves.

One impressive variety recently created is **Fusion Yellow Glow** (shown above). Some plant suppliers call it ‘**Creamy Yellow.**’ Breeders report it to be the world’s first yellow flowered Impatiens variety. The petals are butter-yellow (some, I have seen, are a fantastic lemon yellow) with orange centers. Like most Impatiens, it blooms all summer. It took breeders years to create this unique plant and its sister (orange and pink) varieties.



Gardeners can also find and grow colorful wild impatiens species. The first species is ***Impatiens arguta*** (shown above), a native of Nepal and Himalayan regions and is... now, don't faint... hardy from zones 7 to 11. Yes, it is a hardy (well, at least for some of us) perennial.

This species forms tubers (like a Dahlia) to survive during the winter. In zones 9 to 11, it blooms all year on tall growing bushes. No matter the growing zone, it thrives well all summer on three feet tall or higher herbaceous-shrubs. The plant prefers cool to warm growing conditions and abhors sunny, hot locations. The warmer your climate zone, the taller and broader it becomes.

It also has a few additional surprises such as having the ability to withstand shady, dry soil but prefers well-drained, moist, fertile soil – like most Impatiens. Its 'icing-on-the-cake' quality is the lovely two to three-inch-long lavender-blue, tubular-shaped flowers with orangish-yellow throats. They hang downward which benefits having them grow

in hanging baskets. If you have space, it can make a great houseplant. Chances are garden centers will never offer this plant for sale. I have never seen seeds provided either. You must find plants via an Internet search of specialty nurseries.



Impatiens balfourii (shown above), called '**Poor Man's Orchid**,' is another old-fashioned species native to regions of the Himalayas and Kashmir. It was once common in gardens but now almost forgotten, eclipsed over these many years by the common bedding *Impatiens*. How sad.

Growing plants from seeds are easy with this species. They can grow to almost four feet tall and wide. Weekend gardeners will get nosebleeds at this height, but these dimensions add charm and interest. The flowers are a soothing bi-color of pink and white, resembling small orchids. It blooms all summer in part to full shade.

This plant can also grow in large containers filled with rich, loamy soil. Remember, it self-seeds 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.



Another old-fashioned favorite is our common **Balsam** (*Impatiens balsamina*.) Its seeds are larger than the common Impatiens and are much easier to germinate.

This plant grows more upright and bushier than our common Impatiens. The flowers are of various colors and shades and can have single to gorgeous double flowers like **Blackberry Trifle** – shown above.

Seeds and plants of this variety and many others are plentiful to find in catalogs and garden centers.



If you admire the stunning blue flowers of *Impatiens arguta*, then ***Impatiens namchabarwensis* Blue Diamond** (shown above) will leave you gasping with breathlessness. The two-inch-long tubular blossoms are blue, ultramarine blue, cobalt blue, sky blue, blue jeans-blue, violet-blue and any other descriptive blue you can think of offhand. Oh, for Pete's sake – the flowers are an honest-to-goodness true blue!

The problem is you will become 'blue' (as in depressed) for this plant is one of the rarest to find. Specialty nurseries (via the Internet) offers

plants and seeds – sometimes. I longed to get this plant and one day saw it, bought it, grew it, admired it, and... you guessed it... killed it with way too much kindness. Oh well, c'est la vie, there were other flowers to grow.

Discovered in 2003, growing in the deep Namcha Barwa Canyon valleys in Tibet, this Impatiens created ecstatic excitement with botanists. Who would believe such a plant exists with such stunning, beautiful blue flowers with pale yellow and white throats? It grows in a Goldilocks Zone of ideal conditions: Not too cold, not too hot – just right – all the time. It dislikes cold climates, but it also hates hot, sunny and humid locations.

I made a mistake thinking it needed partly shady, warm and humid conditions that other Impatiens prefer. No, it prefers cool, semi-humid shady areas having well drained, very fertile soil. Speaking Nepalese to it could also help it thrive. It can grow well in containers having and experiencing the same growing conditions. A well-grown plant can reach to under two feet tall and wide can display several of these stunning blossoms.

Someday I will try to grow this gem once again. Maybe I will keep it alive one day longer this time.



Not to be out-done in having flamboyant petal colors is this native African species called *Impatiens niamniamensis* 'African Queen' (shown above) and 'Congo Cockatoo'. This plant grows to three feet tall, in ideal conditions, with glossy green leaves, displaying petals of bright yellow, red and green, described as 'miniature parrots in flight.' Congo Cockatoo goes one step further in the "amazing descriptions accolades" by adding contrasting variegated leaves. The ever-blooming flowers are short and stubby with a 'little tail' spur which most or all *Impatiens* sport in various lengths.

Hardy only to zone 10, it can grow well in a container placed in shady areas. Whatever you do – do not allow it access to prolonged, full sunlight for the leaves will get a severe sunburn. Hot, moist locations will kill this plant. Early morning sunshine is fine, but for the rest of the day, it would appreciate staying in the shadow of other plants. It loves the cool shade, rich, moist, well-drained soil to grow and bloom.

Of all the above described tropical Impatiens species this one is raised with minimal attention. It can grow to well over three feet tall and wide but can be cut back with no ill effects.

Like the other tropical species, this plant can be a challenge to find, especially the Congo Cockatoo cultivar. Garden centers will not offer them, but some online rare plant nurseries sometimes have a few plants for sale. By all means possible, try to purchase these unusual, beautiful plants. They can be challenging to grow but are never boring!

Ipomoea – Japanese Morning-Glories

Fortunately, some people have an eye for beauty.

There are so many morning-glory varieties to choose from but check out the selections from Japan offered by larger seed companies. They have several unusual and colorful varieties to amaze you and your gardening friends.

South American and later Chinese cultures used the seeds as mind-altering drugs. 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.

The *nil* species is called **Japanese Morning-glories** but also known as **Picotee Morning-glories** for having a thin white rim around the flower circumference. They are more orderly – forming less long, invasive vines. Some varieties have variegated felted leaves. Complex genetical factors involving the incorporation of other morning-glory species genes produces few fertile seeds. Morning-glory genetics is really a totally messed-up affair creating wildly colorful blossoms.

This species makes it the showiest of all morning-glories and highly valued as an ornamental plant (especially as a container plant) in Japan. Growing potted morning-glories of different colors and sizes are and have been for generations, popular in Japan.

To better understand how different these morning-glories compare to commonly grown ones here are two rarely offered examples.

***Ipomoea nil* – Fujishibori “Wisteria Tie-Dye”**



This variety ranks as the most beautiful, unusual, and most sought-after morning-glory 'out there.' Its large four-inch blossoms have a white background but speckled or spotted with blue or purple. Each flower is distinct with varying degrees of spottiness.

Unlike most other morning-glories, this variety prefers to grow in partial shade to prevent the petals from 'browning,' or discoloring from the hot, late morning sunlight.

Due to its mixed-up genetics, the vine has variegated leaves and is slower growing than most varieties. It also produces less seed even though it is an open-pollinated (non-hybrid) variety. No matter, it is gorgeous and blooms all summer.

By all means, please grow it in containers and place it center stage for all to enjoy! Also, try to locate the **Kikyo Red Speckled** variety. It is like the Tie-Dye variety but has red spots.

***Ipomoea purpurea* “Pink Striped Feathered Hige”**



Some Japanese morning-glories are of the *purpurea* species heritage and can create unusual double-flowered varieties. This rare type has double, white, feathery petals with pink stripes. Sometimes the flowers will look like peppermint candy canes!

The “Hige” part of the name is Japanese for a beard or whiskers. Since double-flowered morning-glories have the extra petals, they cannot ‘close-up’ for the day and remain open. Always remember, planting them in full sun may cause the blossoms to look “wilted” during the day. Try planting these plants in partial shade to extend the beauty of these enchanting flowers.

Lathyrus – Sweet Pea

Items in the Lost and Found department.

Many gardeners associate Sweet Peas with the fragrant and colorful *Lathyrus odorata* varieties. They are climbing vines blooming in the late spring and early summer. The following two unique species have an air of mystery. Let's add some intrigue for a reason to enjoy the following gorgeous plants.

Lathyrus belinensis 'The Belin Sweet Pea'



Just when you thought nothing else could surprise you in gardening, this valuable botanical gem called **The Belin Sweet Pea** comes along. This Sweet Pea 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 small village of Belin, Turkey. Seeds were collected (thank goodness) and passed along to other excited botanists. Over the years, the original group of plants was destroyed to build a police station and subsequent boring landscaping.

Today, only small populations of the 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! Second, is their 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 less 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 the bright yellow color to them. As of now – no luck – but gene splicing offers more hope in incorporating this elusive color. You need to grow this rare plant for your garden!

Lathyrus sativus 'King Tut'



Although our common Sweet Pea varieties seem to gain all the accolades of prestige and honor to grace our gardens, this 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**.

Gather around everyone for you are about to learn about this botanical mystery. As the legend begins, the famed English archaeologist and Egyptologist, Howard Carter discovered the tomb of Egyptian pharaoh Tutankhamun, or, nicknamed, "King Tut," on November 4, 1922. He and his assistants found while rummaging around Mr. Tut's personal burial belongings (poor kid), seeds of this plant. They spirited them and other valuable 'golden goodies' off 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 5000 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 necessary 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 5000-year-old seeds would not survive so long in a tomb. A more plausible story is *Lathyrus sativus* grows in that area and throughout the Middle East, Northern and Eastern Africa and into Asia. Someone sent Lord Carnarvon some fresh seeds (or he collected himself) and grew some in his large estate gardens.

You can believe this story or not, but what is true is this pea having gorgeous sky-blue to purple blossoms. With the addition of a few stripes of pink (like marbling), it creates 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, if consumed in large amounts over more extended periods of time, they can be poisonous. Just stick to eating your green garden peas instead, and enjoy the beauty of this pea, the Belin Sweet Pea and our ordinary Sweet Peas for the flower garden.

Lilium – Lily

And I am a Material Gardener.

No garden is complete without the beauty, grace, and wonder of a Lily. We are all accustomed to the traditional Easter Lily, but 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.

***Lilium candidum* 'The Madonna Lily'**



CC0 Photo courtesy of Morguefile.com

This is not a lily associated with music-star 'I am a Material Girl' Madonna but of the Virgin Mary religious fame. Historians believe this

species to the oldest cultivated ornamental plant with historical and artistic references going back for 3,000 years. And no wonder, for this lily is so darn pretty!

According to legend, this lily became associated with the Virgin Mary. Many Medieval and Renaissance paintings depict Mary with these white flowers. The pure white sepals, golden anthers, and sweet perfume are symbolic of her pureness of body, heart, and soul.

The Madonna Lily has different growing requirements and habits than other lilies. Flowering in the spring, it goes dormant during the summer but forms a rosette of foliage on the ground late in the fall and over the winter. All other lilies (and most other flowering plants) are the opposite. This lily blooms before all others with several pure white trumpets and sweet perfume.

One of my most vivid memories is of my mother growing this lily in her garden. Even being a little boy, I could not understand why this plant had green leaves in the heart of winter, surviving under inches of snow and able to bloom by early May. This lily made no sense – which may have sparked the initial interest in botany for me.

This lily was once popular in cottage gardens but is, sadly, now forgotten by gardeners and nurseries. Most nurseries will not have bulbs of this lily – possibly because of its different growth cycle. Specialty nurseries would be your best bet in getting bulbs. Please grow this unique and beautiful lily in your garden!

Lilium longiflorum 'The Easter Lily'



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Many people often confuse this gorgeous lily with the Madonna Lily. Christian churches have always associated this lily with Jesus's resurrection (aka Easter). The problem is, *Lilium longiflorum* is native to Taiwan and other Japanese islands. I know Jesus never took a vacation to those areas but, the Madonna Lily is native to the Middle East.

Okay, it's easy to determine which lily should be in religious ceremonies, but this Lily is easier to grow in pots and containers by nurseries for Easter. I suspect few people can tell the difference between the sight and fragrance of these plants.

Lilium orientalis 'Stargazer' Lily



For garden lilies, this variety is the most recognizable – 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 so popular? The answer is because it needs to be in your garden if it isn't there already.

Historically, this lily is a significant genetic contributor in creating many other bulbs sold today. Predecessors of this lily (based on wild species heritage) had their large flowers hang downward. They were pretty, but they hide their real 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 fantastic name for this stunning plant! From this lily, newer varieties appeared with other

colors, but 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. I know I am getting old when I do not recognize more modern actors but still gravitate to the older (or deceased) stars via *Turner Classic Movies* on television.

Let's look at two new and gorgeous Oriental lily-stars I recommend you grow in your garden.



Developed in the early 2000s, double-flowered Oriental lilies (known as **Rose-Lilies**) are taking 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.

Having those extra petals caused the blossom to lose most (or all) its stamens. For breeders, this causes problems for breeding other lilies, but florists love it for not having the messy, discoloring pollen. Well, there's something I never thought about before – the scourge of discoloring, messy pollen. Anyway, other double-flowering lilies are in the offing.

These new lilies are hardy from zones 5 to 9 and also make excellent container displays. It will grow to five feet tall and produce several flowers for your enjoyment (and amazement) from mid to late summer.



Another "I've got to grow this amazing lily" for your garden should be a giant – one you will look up to. Called **Conca d'Or** (shown above), needs to be in every garden.

When viewing this lily, I have to look up while gorgeous eight to nine-inch diameter blossoms look down at me. One added benefit to having lilies at this altitude is the fragrance is closer to our noses, without having to stoop over. It has enormous – and I mean huge – blossoms! They are white with an interior of bright lemon yellow. The anthers have a brick-red color.

Classified as an Oriental – Trumpet hybrid (called **Orienpet Lilies**) these Lilies can reach as tall as eight feet after growing for, at least, three years. It is hardy from zones 4 to 9. 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 do this action.

Lycoris – Naked Ladies

Lycoris squamigera



What else would grow at the Playboy mansion gardens?

It's not what you think. However, you can have some fun with your friends by saying, "Come on over to see the naked ladies in my garden!" This nickname is one of the several common names for this perennial bulb. The other names are Surprise Lily, Magic Lily, and Resurrection Lily. The reason for these nicknames is the flower stalks grow out of the ground in late summer before the leaves develop. Yes, you read that right. This plant is one of those curious oddities Dr. Seuss would grow in his garden (with help from Thing 1 and Thing 2.)

It may also surprise you to see them blooming since the stems blend in well with other plants. Some gardening authorities (yes, just like the know-it-all ones from your garden club) suggest planting them in with Hosta plants. I have the foggiest notion why. Maybe they want them clothed with some large leaves. I say plant them where you can enjoy their bare-naked-stem beauty!

The bulbs will bloom for three weeks or more. 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 mid to late-summer. Then, the cycle begins again. These plants may have come from an alternate universe!

Believed to have originated from China, Korea or Japan, they are hardy in zones 4 to 10 and love to grow in full to partial sunlight and well-drained soil. It is important not to disturb these bulbs. Plant and forget them except for fertilizing and watering when they are in growth. Don't dig them up or transplant them!

Many people say the Amaryllis-like blossoms have a sweet fragrance while others swear they smell like a natural gas leak. No matter, for the beauty of those lovely pink flowers are for eye-catching appeal. Growing these bulbs is the only way for most guys to have naked ladies in their garden without having police intervention due to neighborhood complaints. Oh well, hope springs eternal!

Malope – Annual Mallow

Malope trifida ‘Vulcan’



Live long and prosper.

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? Well, 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” along with “this is a ‘WOW’ flower!” Even the great garden writer and author,

Louise Beebe Wilder recommended gardeners to grow this plant back in 1935. Boldly we go into a stellar garden, *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.

So, with all these outstanding tributes and high honors, it begs the question of "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 plants – forget looking. Either I am "flower-blind" when previewing all the various flowers offered for sale at nurseries and overlooked it or, most likely, nurseries never grow it. 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 to over three feet tall, but you can control this height by nipping the top-most growth. Cut-flowers will last almost a week – or longer – in a vase. Let's include another 'WOW' right now.

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

Malva – Common Mallow

Malva sylvestris ‘Zebrina’



Tell a zebra to say “cheese” when photographing it.

When viewing these flowers for the first time, we assume they are Hollyhocks or small Hibiscus. Looks are deceiving for they are different. Malva flowers are smaller and less ‘gaudy’ (for want of a less mean-spirited word) than some Hollyhock blossoms. Easy to grow, Malva plants are biennial but can be a short-lived perennial by the constant removal of all spent flowers. Each blossom can produce an excessive amount of seeds to weaken the plant for the winter. It can be a summer-blooming annual if you sow seeds indoors very early in the spring.

The species flowers are shades of pale lavender to pink or white. A stunning and popular variety is '**Zebrina**' or the '**Zebra Hollyhock**' (shown above.) Each two-inch, pale lavender blossom has deep purple floral-throats and veins. The pattern has a slight resemblance to zebra stripes. The floral spikes can grow to three feet tall, but many side branching can create bushy clumps. Flowering can occur anytime from late spring until a killing frost. A young, overwintering plant can survive typical zone 4 winters.

This variety was popular to grow in cottage gardens years ago but less grown in today's gardens. Who can resist an attractive, easy-to-grow, and quick to bloom plant?

Historically, native to northern Europe and Africa and has spread elsewhere, Malva (like many favorite plants) has numerous nicknames such as High Mallow or Striped Mallow. One other somewhat unusual nickname is "Cheeses" or "cheese plant." No, that is not a bizarre mistake. Why name it after a dairy product? The plant has nothing to do in making cheese, but the seeds look as cheddar or gouda cheese wheels. Just when nothing else can surprise you in flower gardening, now the subject of cheese wheels arises. And now my mouth is watering, and my tummy is growling. Time to raid the 'fridge! Where's that box of crackers?

For most Malvas, including the Zebrina variety, seeds are available in a few larger seed catalogs. I have never found plants available in garden centers. Mail-order nurseries will be the best places to hunt for plants.

Mirabilis – Four O'Clocks or Marvel of Peru

To be specific, it's a 4:00 pm plant.

These plants Latin name means “marvelous”, referring to their floral beauty. That word 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. If they are growing in partial shade, they may open after four o'clock. However, I would not set a clock by them.

If the time telling act does not interest you possibly the color, size and number of blossoms will. Let's examine three unusual species you can have blooming next year in your garden.

Mirabilis jalapa “Broken Colors”



This common (and more well-known) species was prevalent in 19th-century gardens but has, sadly, being less grown today. One reason is we now have many more bedding flowers to choose from in nurseries. But, there are new, exciting varieties to grow today.

The other common name for these fragrant flowers is Marvel of Peru for they are native to this area of South America. The flowers can be your basic solid white, pink, red and yellow but there is a multi-colored variety called the **Broken Colors Series** (shown above) having stripes, splashes, smears, spots, and blemishes of different colors on the same flower. I have seen plants have many weird, but vivid, multicolor flowers.

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 a 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!

Seeds are found in many seed catalogs but limited in garden centers.

***Mirabilis longiflora* “Angel’s Trumpets” or “Sweet Four O’Clock”**



The common name for this rare plant refers to the incredible length of the flowers. Each two feet tall bushy plant sports hundreds of four to six-inch-long, tubular, white blossoms with purple-rose stamens. They

bloom all summer releasing a jasmine-like perfume into the evening air. The petals open at dusk and remain so throughout the night and into the early morning.

This species is native to the southwestern United States and northern Mexico.

Seeds are found only in some rare seed catalogs.

***Mirabilis multiflora* “Colorado Four O’Clock”**



Other common names for this popular plant are Showy Four O'clock and High Desert Four O'clock. The species name of multiflora (meaning many-flowered) has a massive number of magenta-pink to pale lavender-blue blossoms with vivid yellow anthers. The beauty of individual blossoms is impressive but when all the flowers open at the

same time – around four o'clock in the afternoon – the display is incredible. Stop what you are doing to enjoy this colorful spectacle.

This species grows up to two feet tall and wide. It's exceptionally well adaptive and hardy to the dry, hot and sunny areas of the western and southwestern regions of the United States and northern Mexico. Try to imagine a sea of blossoms over a dry grassy or semi-desert landscape.

For your garden, this plant will grow well in sandy and gravelly soils. As long as you plant it in full sunlight and well-drained soil, it will grow well. Hardy to zone 4 to 9, it will survive cold winters with a thick taproot – but, only if the soil drains excess water. Constant wet soil will cause the roots to rot. It grows well in large containers (which I use) but, bring the pots indoors for the winter. Do not transplant the taproot for it can break. Next summer you will have an even greater sized plant.

Forget about finding this plant offered in garden centers. Specialty nurseries catering to desert wildflowers sell seeds of this species.

Oenothera – Evening Primrose

***Oenothera glazioviana* “Tina James Magic Evening Primrose”**



Who needs Harry Potter when you can grow this plant.

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

In the evening, the large, yellow flowers slowly open (like in time-lapse photography) right before your eyes. I have watched the flower bud petals begin to open at 8:30 pm and ten minutes later they were fully open. No fooling! Sometimes, the flower buds would “get stuck” from

opening and then POP open (with the corresponding soft-popping sound effects.)

The blossoms also exude a sweet and alluring perfume all evening and well into the night. 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 might invite a few police officers to the party. Hey, more the merrier!

When I had my mail-order flower nursery, I received an email from Gail in Arkansas who wrote about her unusual experience with this plant. Here is what she wrote:

"I ordered several things from you 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 3 feet high and the highest flower count for one evening show was 67 blooms."

Seeds are scarce to locate, but they are "out there – somewhere" so your best bet is to use an internet search. Please note, this plant is a biennial – it grows the first year then blooms the next. It self-seeds, but sow seeds each spring to establish flowering plants for next year's summer.

Papaver- Poppy

As long as no Flying Monkeys are in the garden, we'll be fine.

When I was growing up (I still am growing, but now it is by width), my mother never grew poppies. I saw plenty of them watching many reruns of the movie *The Wizard of Oz*, but I never convinced my mother to raise them. Who knows, maybe she had a fear of me turning into a drug addict.

Now, as an adult, I wonder if the Emerald City, surrounded by vast fields of poppies, and an “all-powerful Wizard” has a deeper meaning. Is that what they called a drug lord in Oz? I wonder what the book’s author, L. Frank Baum was alluding to in his children’s story? Sorry, my train of thought gets derailed – which you already know from reading this and my other ebooks.

Since I have destroyed your innocence over that book (and movie), let’s concentrate on growing colorful poppies for your garden. They all prefer to grow in full to partial sunlight in well-drained, fertile soil, and they make excellent container displays and cut flowers.

The following poppy varieties are available only as seeds from larger seed companies.

***Papaver somniferum* – Opium and Bread Seed Poppy**



Since I mentioned the land of Oz and the poppy fields, let's review these annual poppies first. Don't fret for commercially available flower garden varieties produce little if any, significant amounts of latex to form opium.

The species Latin name means 'to bring on sleep,' but the fantastic color of their flowers will keep you wide-eyed awake. Many single to double-flowered varieties (many with blossoms up to four to five inches in diameter) are available in shades of white, red, pink, purple, and stunning bicolors.

One such double bicolor catches my eye. Called **Black Swan** (shown above), has semi-double, frilly, red and purple petals. It looks like the flower bud exploded into a colorful confetti mess! If this poppy doesn't make you stop and stare, I do not understand what other variety can. Well, many varieties will, but I love this one!

These annuals self-seed and bloom from early to mid-summer. Unless you cut off the developing seed capsules, a multitude of seedlings will emerge next spring.

***Papaver rhoeas* – Corn Poppy**



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This popular species has several common names include field poppy, red poppy, and “the common garden poppy.” Notable as a colorful weed in farm fields (especially in Europe), it became a tragic symbol of World War I. Known as the Flanders Poppy, it bloomed in the farm fields where soldiers died in battle. They inspired Canadian Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae to write his famous poem, “*In Flanders Field*” in 1919. Although it is a commonly grown poppy, I love how it will pop-up here-and-there in a garden every spring from self-sown seed.

These poppies are not always bright red. In 1880, the Reverend William Wilks of Shirley, England (a suburb of London) discovered one or more of his red poppies had different shades of color. Being a good gardener, he saved seed of his variations over the years and planted them. He built up a line of different colors, and they became known as the **Shirley Poppy**. These plants now have vivid yellow, pink, orange and even white variations.

You can find these seeds in many seed catalogs and purchase potted plants in garden centers.

Papaver nudicaule – Iceland Poppy



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

While the above poppies are annuals, this species takes honors as being a perennial, with a few caveats. This species is temperamental; being

'somewhat' challenging to raise and grow. It can be slow growing, so have patience when raising the seedlings.

Native to the far northern regions of North America and Asia, this poppy loves colder climates and soil. It's hardy from zones 3 to 5 (as a perennial), but in warmer locations, it will be an annual or biennial. Don't worry about it – sow the seeds outdoors in a sunny area of the garden in the Fall. Then, cross your fingers for late spring and early summer flowers. Please remember, the seedlings do not transplant well due to having long taproots.

The crepe paper-like petals have bright colors ranging from red, yellow, orange, pink and white with bicolors galore. They make beautiful, long-lasting cut flowers – if the stems are long enough depending on the variety. Cut a stem, sear the ends with a flame and then place it in a vase of cold water.

You can never go wrong in having all the poppies mentioned here growing in your garden.

Pelargonium – Zonal Geraniums

Pelargonium hybridum "First Yellow"



'Getting into the zone' when gardening.

I am not brave enough to enter the bizarro world of Geraniums and Pelargoniums. Why? Their names are so interchangeable to the point of confusion. There is a multitude of species with an even more significant number of hybrid variations. Trying to comprehend their relationships will strain anyone's brain cells to the point of bursting. Understanding Einstein's mathematical Relativity theories are so much simpler. But, this ebook would not be complete if I did not mention at least one rare variety from this large family of plants to grow in your garden.

Let's start with our primary and common "geraniums" which are mass-planted in gardens worldwide. Notice I placed "geraniums" in quotation marks; the correct word should be Pelargoniums. Confused? You should be, but I am not falling into the detailed explanation trap. I will let Google handle that mind-numbing lesson. Let's call them geraniums and concentrate on the flowers, shall we?

Our common geraniums have either solid green leaves or a variegated, centralized, contrasting bronze band called zonal leaves. These small, but bushy plants have semi-succulent stems topped with clusters of pink, violet, white, salmon-orange, and the traditional favorite of red or scarlet blossoms. But, one color – yellow – is missing.

A few species of Pelargoniums have small yellow flowers but having a yellow flowered zonal bedding geranium was a pipe-dream. Sometimes, dreams come true, and it happened when German breeders recently developed a pale-yellow flowered variety. Named **First Yellow** (or **First Yellow Improved**,) has clusters of pale yellow, semi-double petaled blossoms on green to pale bronzed, zoned leaves.

Contrary to what some devious nursery websites portray, these flowers do not have a Photoshopped daffodil-yellow color. The shade is closer to creamy butter. In full sunlight, the color is 'off-white.' I know, disappointing, isn't? But, it is still a breakthrough and possibly in a few more years (maybe now when you read this ebook) a more profound yellow cultivar will grace our gardens.

This variety will grow in the same conditions as our regular geraniums – full to partial sunlight, fertile and well-drained soil. Don't over-water these plants since they are semi-succulent. Constant wet soil will rot the roots and stems. The occasional dry soil will satisfy these plants. Container growing is a better way to admire this rare plant.

As of this writing, the only way to get it is by ordering rooted plants via mail-order nurseries. Garden centers may sell it only if public awareness and demand increase. Once the petals gain a deeper shade of yellow the demand will never cease!

Petunia

Petunia axillaris, integrifolia, exserta, grandiflora

“Simplicity, patience, compassion. These three are your greatest treasures...”

How can we get excited about growing these favorite bedding plants? Don't misunderstand me for I love them. What is there about Petunias to spark new interest? Well, let's apply some gardening philosophy: the planting of a thousand flowers begins with a single plant. Sorry, I stole and modified a famous saying from Lao Tzu's *'Tao Te Ching'*, but the meaning is still the same. All popular flowers had to start with their parental species.

There are over 20 species of Petunia growing in South America. Some of these species are now available (by seed), and you should raise them in your garden.



One of the original parent Petunia species breeders used to create the hundreds of varieties for our gardens is *Petunia axillaris*. Discovered in 1823 by a French botanist named Petun, (honored with this plant's Latin name), it is native to the pampas of Argentina.

This species flaunts attractive, large, fragrant, white flowers. Now called '**Rain Master**' (shown above), its petals resist damage by torrential rains – unlike some modern, 'large petal' varieties.



Petunia integrifolia (formerly *Petunia violacea*), another Argentinian species (shown above), has different looking blossoms. This one has beautiful, bright pink flowers with deep lavender-blue throats. The blooms are smaller and “stubbier” than our typical-constructed Petunia flowers.

The plants are less bushy and spread more along the ground.



In 1987, word spread throughout the world of 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 red, star-shaped flowers highlighted with bright yellow pollen on its anthers.

Unlike most (or almost) all other *Petunias*, hummingbirds pollinate this one. Insects visit all other species to pollinate the flowers. 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 *Petunia* to commit species suicide!

You can get seeds of this species from larger seed companies.



“And now for something completely different...” (from Monty Python’s Flying Circus), please grow ***Petunia grandiflora*** ‘**Giants of California**’ (shown above) in your garden. Well, ‘try to grow’ is the operative phrase here. Seeds are scarce to find. Imitations are sometimes available but are not “the real McCoy.” It is possible this old variety no longer exists.

Developed as a mixture of colors during the 1880s, this Petunia was all the rage among gardeners. The average extravagant-colored blossom measured six inches in diameter! The petals were wavy and curved backward exposing a vast network of contrasting colorful veins.

For decades, this Petunia was popular for gardeners competing to have the most colorful flowers. Later, our 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 all colors of the rainbow. There are shades of green, 'almost'- black, spotted-dotted colors and mixed-up double petal varieties of Petunias. Whatever color catches your eye – plant it and enjoy it!

Salpiglossis – Painted Tongue or Velvet Trumpet Flower

Salpiglossis sinuata

Gardening at Tiffany's.

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 then with wide-eyed wonder. It still amazes non-gardeners who first encounter its stunning beauty. You may have deduced by now 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 varieties (the best ones) are wickedly gorgeous appearing like stained glass etched or overlay with shining gold. Three excellent varieties of Salpiglossis are:

Salpiglossis 'Kew Blue'



This variety originated from the world-famous Kew Gardens in England. If you love blue or purple flowers, this variety should be your number one choice to grow in your garden. 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'



Another beautiful variety, this one flaunting velvety-red blooms highlighted with molten gold centers and veins. It's a "hot-hot-hot" flower for your cool-looking (as in a great-looking) garden.

Salpiglossis 'Royale Purple Bicolor'



This is an aptly named variety which sports blue-purple blossoms with bright golden-yellow veins. Younger flowers have a shade of wine-red, but royal-purple with gold rules over the display. The effect is gorgeous!

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.

The 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. Like

petunias, if the plants get too tall and 'gnarly', trim them back and they will re-bloom in two weeks. If planted in a bed, border or container, make sure the plants grow in fertile and well-drained soil.

In all my years of gardening, I have never found this plant offered for sale in garden centers. I suppose more emphasis is on Petunias since they are easier to grow. 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, like those listed above.

Saponaria – Bouncing Bet, Soapwort

Saponaria officinalis alba plena



Rub a dub dub, Soapwort in the tub.

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 and is a terrific bloomer 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 the 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, and controlled by the downward thrust of a sharp spade. Yes, that sounds horrible, but sometimes we have to practice ‘tough love’ on some overactive plants. It tolerates dry soil conditions and has few if any, insect or disease problems. No wonder, for the bugs doesn’t want soap in their little mouths!

A recommended variety (which is the species only dressed-up) has double-petaled white flowers. It is unable to form seeds, so you have to propagate it by cuttings. The magnified grape fragrance is due to the extra set of petals. It is rare to find. Overall, it is a plant worth finding, growing and enjoying!

Stokesia – Stokes Aster

Stokesia laevis



This beautiful flower is peachy-keen!

While walking among the display beds at my favorite arboretum garden, I always meet several plants of this beautiful purple-blue perennial flower. At first, I never knew what it was (the identification tags of flowers always disappear.) The petals, when fully extended, were frilly, but it looked like an Aster. Later, I discovered it's a Stokesia plant. Here is a prime example of appearances can be deceiving. The plant has beautiful four-inch, purple-blue daisy-like flowers for most of the summer.

Named for English physician and botanist, Jonathan Stokes (1755-1831), it is a native wildflower in the southeastern parts of the United States. Mother Nature decided this would be the only species for it has no other close relatives. Hardy from zones 5 to 10, it grows well in full to partial sunlight in many soil types but requires well-drained conditions especially in the winter. Constantly wet or ice-covered soil will kill it so make sure the soil is porous.

For someone who loves to discover new plants to grow in a garden, it confused me why I had never encountered this plant before – especially in nurseries and garden centers. In case you haven't discovered it either, make sure you search for and grow the variety called **Peachie's Pick**.

Discovered growing in her flower garden a few years ago, Mississippi gardener and florist, Peachie Saxon knew she had something extra special. This plant grew different (and better) from all other seed-grown plants in her garden. It displays shorter sized plants (two feet tall) with much larger, upright facing, deeper blue flowers. The plant's 'icing-on-the-cake' most valuable trait is the flowers are sterile. Wild grown plants self-seeds with abandon, but Peachie's plant does not. This is ideal for it saves valuable energy to produce longer blooming and offer extra hardiness.

Another variety to find is **Honeysong Purple** having deeper purple flowers with shorter growing stems.

Stokesia provides plenty of cut-flowers over the summer and enticing nectar for several butterfly species, especially swallowtails. I hope these delightful varieties will entice you into growing several in your garden. Who can pass-up having gorgeous blue flowers in a garden? Not I – or you!

Tagetes – Marigolds

Tagetes erecta 'Golden Age'



The best of both worlds.

You are rolling your eyes reacting to my decision to include these annuals as must-grow flowers. Before you hurry right along to the next flower, let me explain my rationale for this inclusion.

Marigolds are one of the easiest of flowers to grow and raise – especially for children. Many times, garden centers, nurseries, and garden shows will often give out small potted plants to children as welcome gifts or door prizes. The large-flowered varieties are African Marigolds (*Tagetes erecta*) while the smaller-flowered ones are the

French Marigolds (*Tagetes patula*) even though these plants originated in Mexico – go figure!

Anyway, their colors range from red to orange, gold, yellow, bicolors, tricolors and off-white. Most varieties will become bushy and bloom all summer. Okay, everything seems to be fine-and-dandy with great reasons to grow these plants. So, let's get to the significant 'deal-breaker' in raising them in your garden.

Marigold leaves and stems always have a peculiar herbal odor that many adults find offensive. The plants only smell when handling or touching the leaves. As a former nurseryman, I noticed it was the adults that complained. I grew hundreds of gorgeous Marigolds in my greenhouse and each year had to endure the complaints of customers about "those horribly smelly flowers." There were times I wished to say, "Well, you plant them and then wash your hands. You don't lie in the flower bed with them!" I never said those words – thought about it many times – but I only smiled. Children, though, were more interested in the beautiful, colorful flowers. They rarely, if ever, complained of the odor. God bless the beasts and the children.

One rare variety, with large, orange, double flowers is **Golden Age**. It differs from most if not all other Marigolds for its leaves are odorless. Like all other Marigolds, it grows well in a sunny area with well-drained, fertile soil.

When introducing flower gardening to a child, or a new gardener, you can't go wrong with a pretty Marigold – like this "un-smelly" one!

Tropaeolum – Nasturtium

Tropaeolum majus ‘Darjeeling Double’



Double your pleasure, double your fun in your garden.

Back in the mid to late 19th century, gardeners were fanatical over growing Nasturtium flowers. Many seed-grown cultivars and named-varieties having extravagant colors were available. The most sought-after types had fully double petals with a striking resemblance to rosebuds. One problem with these double petal varieties is they are sterile – unable to form seeds. Growers propagate these plants with stem cuttings, but this limits their availability to gardeners.

Darjeeling Double (or **Darjeeling Gold**) is a rare, double-petal variety discovered growing in India. Specialty nurseries now produce and sell

it to the public. It is similar in appearance to a mutation developed in the late 1800s. The petals are fully double, having a deep golden Daffodil yellow color. I was ecstatic when I could buy this expensive plant and see it bloom. Oh my, what a beauty! No wonder gardeners 'back then' went rabid in growing these flowers.

Other rare varieties (including one original cultivar) still exist. The variety called '**Hermine Grashoff**' still grows and believed to be the oldest surviving 'antique' Nasturtium still available. Think of it – propagated by stem cuttings all these years! It has a full, but loose, double salmon-red petals.

Also, look out for another cultivar called '**Margaret Long**' with fully double, peach-yellow or pastel orange blossoms. Growers determined it to be a form of the Hermine Grashoff cultivar. Discovered in an Irish garden in the 1930s, someone kept it a secret to the public until the early 1980s. Over time, a few European nurseries propagated it for gardeners. Today, it's still scarce and difficult to find. If you live in Europe, you will have a better chance of getting this and the other mentioned double-flowered varieties.

Like most of the seed-grown Nasturtiums, these rare plants prefer cooler growing conditions to bloom well. They grow more slowly and form trailing stems instead of growing upright. They prefer to grow in full to partial sunlight, fertile but well-drained soil.

Please – try to raise these plants in containers to appreciate their beauty up close. Since they are annuals, they will need propagating by stem-cuttings to keep them "young" and healthy. Since these plants are scarce, they will require careful attention and culture. Their beauty is well worth the time and trouble to keep them available for future gardeners to love and cherish.

Vigna – Corkscrew Vine or Snail Vine

Vigna caracalla



I suppose someone could call them 'Nautilus Vine.'

Vigna is a tropical perennial climbing vine (hardy to zone 9 to 10) native to the jungles of Central and South America – but, is an annual for most gardens. This vine produces large clusters of Sweet Pea-like

flowers, contorted as a corkscrew or as a snail shell. Their petals are white and purple-blue but change to creamy yellow with age. But the huge deal is the strong spring Hyacinth fragrance from all those blossoms. You can enjoy them from mid-summer and well into Fall before a hard frost kills the vine tops.

This plant thrives in full to part sun (for greatest flower production), fertile soil, and moderate watering. The vines twine upward to about 15 feet by Fall and will need to grow on a stable supporting structure such as a sturdy trellis or fence. Even at that height, there will be plenty of flowers at eye and nose level.

Even though the vines will die after a killing frost, you can save the swollen tuberous roots by carefully digging them up and keeping them in damp peat moss or potting soil over the winter. Replant these roots when the soil warms in late spring for an even greater show of flowers in the summer.

A few larger seed catalog companies offer seeds of this colorful vine, but they always sell out early in the Spring.

Conclusion

So many flowers, so little time to admire them all.

With so many flowers available to gardeners, I could include several more must-grow plants for your garden. I based my main criteria for which flowers to add in this ebook on uniqueness or rarity, long-blooming, outstanding color, and other qualities. One other factor is my opinion on growing several of these plants over the years.

Although I mentioned 'long-blooming' as a reason to grow these flowers, please don't overlook other plants that lack an extended bloom time. Many of the most beautiful and enjoyable flowers experience a short time to "strut their stuff."

The main point of this ebook is to enjoy the beauty of a single blossom. Many times, we look at a flower garden or bed and admire "the big, colorful picture." For me, I see a single blossom and admire its compelling form and an exquisite blend of colors. Instead of viewing the grandeur of a forest I have always admired the beauty of a single tree.

Stop growing the same flowers everyone else plants! Be an adventuresome gardener and discover those outlandish, unusual and colorful flowers. Make your garden one of the wonders of your neighborhood.

Thank you for reading this ebook.

I hope you have enjoyed learning something new about must-grow flowers for your garden. I have other related ebooks with an emphasis on fragrant, rare, and unique plants. They are part of ***The Scent of Your Garden*** series. I think you will enjoy reading and learning from them.

Please visit my author website of <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 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.