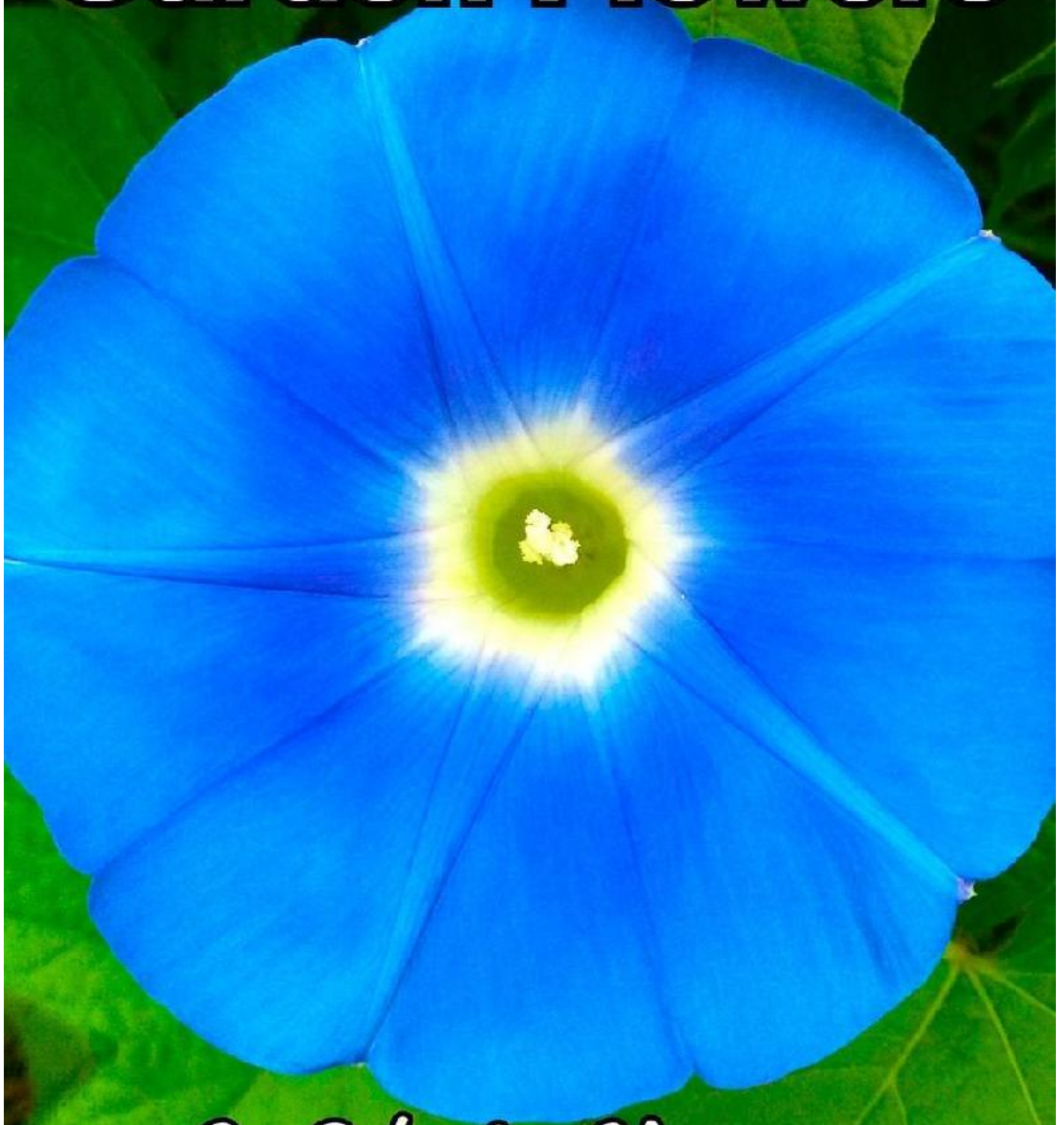


Truly Blue-tiful Garden Flowers



G. Edwin Varner

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TRULY BLUE-TIFUL GARDEN FLOWERS

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Written by G. Edwin Varner.

Preface

This entertaining ebook describes several outstanding true-blue garden flowers, providing abundant seasonal beauty, enjoyment, and enduring serenity. However, it does not include purple flowers, even though they are gorgeous and enjoyable.

In its myriad shades, blue is a universally revered color across cultures. It's also the rarest naturally occurring color. Psychologically, we find solace in anything that displays blue, from a clear sky to large bodies of water, sparkling gemstones, and even our clothes. True blue or the elusively real sky-blue flowers are a rarity and will be prominently acknowledged in this publication.

Please note: I have copied some plant descriptions from my previous ebooks and included them in this ebook. They include additional information and corrections of now-known mistakes, including silly grammatical and spelling errors. Other plants in this publication are new entries.

I must also acknowledge that I have edited some photos to increase sharpness and brightness and adapt them to this ebook format. However, I have tried to keep the flower colors as close to their true nature as possible, avoiding any enhanced extravagances.

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

Introduction

Plenty of flower descriptions in this ebook highlight various shades of blue. It is like visiting the paint department at a home improvement store and being confused by all the possible hundred shades of blue paint swatches available when choosing that “just right” color. Their descriptive sample paint names are equally impressive.

Botanists estimate that less than 10% of all flowering plants display blue petals. According to David Lee, author of the book Nature's Palette: The Science of Plant Color, "There is no true-blue pigment in plants, so plants don't have a direct way of making a blue color."

He emphasizes that to create blue (as perceived by our eyes), plants undergo various modifications and blending of pre-existing anthocyanin pigments, interactions with aluminum ions (lowering the pH values), and rearrangements of the anthocyanin molecular structure. It's highly complex biochemistry, but Mama Nature has spent millions of years perfecting the blue-making recipe. All these modifications are ultimately based on genetics, a critical factor in producing plant coloration.

The whole point of coloring flower petals is to attract pollinators. Blue is one of the least attractable wavelengths of visible light. The closest color to blue, providing a more “attraction-action” color, is ultraviolet, which is invisible to us but visible to most pollinating insects. Hummingbirds famously prefer red blossoms but will also visit blue ones.

In this ebook, blue flower descriptions will range from powder blue to sky blue, azure blue, denim blue, sapphire blue, cobalt blue, delft blue, lapis lazuli blue, turquoise, and intense blue. Are there any more blues? Yes, there are plenty more. I have avoided adding noticeably purple flowers since they are not blue-blue. Including them would extend this publication to several additional pages. True-blue or the elusively real sky-blue flowers are a rarity and will be prominently acknowledged in this publication.

As we delve into the world of blue flowers, let's remember that color perception can vary. While these flowers fall within the spectrum of blue, your vision and opinion may differ. Let's agree to appreciate the beauty of these flowers, regardless of our interpretations. This shared appreciation can unite us in loving all rare and beautiful blue flowers.

Agastache – Mexican Hyssop; Anise Hyssop; Hummingbird Mint

Agastache foeniculum; Agastache rugosa



Originating from the desert environment of southwestern North America, these plants are popular yearly because of their tremendous flower production, long blooming, and exciting colors. They also attract butterflies and hummingbirds by the million. Well, not precisely...far from it...but several during the summer.

Agastache flowers resemble those of Salvia, with long, drawn-out petals. The leaves and stems exude an exhilarating licorice or peppermint fragrance.

With Agastache, there's a world of variety to explore. From stunning blends of pink, rose, pale orange, and peach to the unique glow they emit when the sun shines through their petals, each variety offers a different visual experience. Most hybrid varieties thrive in zones 5 to 9, making them versatile for many gardens.

But what about the color blue? Strangely, only two species, *Agastache rugosa* and *Agastache foeniculum*, display this color. They look similar by growing to three feet or taller, becoming bushy with plentiful clusters of tiny blossoms on the tall spikes. Like all other Agastache relations, they tolerate dry soil and heat when fully mature.

Look for **Blue Fortune**, a hybrid of *foeniculum* and *rugosa* with gorgeous lavender-blue flower spikes. It blooms not as tall as other Agastache plants, so it will fit perfectly in any bed or border without being overly invasive. You can include it in larger containers. Its leaves have the characteristic aroma of anise or licorice.

Want a couple more stop-and-stare-at varieties to include in your garden? The award-winning '**Blue Boa**' hybrid has taller and larger flower spikes packed with vivid, deeper blue blossoms. If you need something smaller but still bushy with abundant indigo-blue flower spikes, select '**Blue Bayou**,' which has a medium-growing nature and is perfect for smaller beds and borders.

All these varieties bloom in summer and fall, attracting plenty of butterflies. Check your larger garden centers and nurseries for their availability.

Ageratum – Floss Flower

Ageratum houstonianum



This plant needs a better public relations agent. It also requires a press agent to get the word out that it makes a great bedding display and border edger. What matters most is that it is one of the few annuals considered to have true-blue flower representatives. Even though some varieties are pink or white, the powdery grayish-blue to lavender blue and “almost” purple flowers are the most popular. The flowers are globular with fluffy, fuzzy, or furry petals and have differing degrees of a sweet scent.

Many gardeners fail to realize that this plant is part of the daisy family, native to Central America and extending into parts of South America. While most varieties grow short, some grow taller, making ideal, if

unusual, cut flowers for attention-getting displays. Quickly grown by seed, the plants bloom by late spring until the first fall frost.

Breeders and growers developed a few varieties highlighting different shades of blue blossoms. Larger online nurseries and garden centers offer them as bedding plants for spring sales. Look for **Blue Blazer**, an older hybrid still available and exhibits uniform low-growing size and excellent blueness. Other recent hybrids include **Blue Carpet** (its growth reliably mimics the name) and **Blue Danube**, considered the best for early blooming, uniform low growth, and a gorgeous deeper blue color.

But wait—there's more! **Blue Planet** (aka **Tall Blue Planet**) makes an excellent cut flower for extra-special bouquets requiring something blue. The stems can reach over two feet, culminating in clusters of gorgeous fluffy lavender blue to pale purple blossoms.

No matter the variety, all *Ageratum* plants require fertile, well-drained soil and full sun to partial shade. Most types may need periodic trimming of spent brown flower clusters to look their best. Adding an occasional jolt of fertilizer each month will overflow your flower garden with spectacular blueness.

You can find practically all *Ageratum* varieties as seeds or potted plants in many nurseries and garden centers. It's time to stop overlooking these beauties and start incorporating them into your garden. Let's end this unfortunate neglect and bring the *Ageratum* plant into the spotlight it deserves.

But wait—there are even more amazing details worth noting. Instead of growing the above annual varieties, how about a perennial type? Yes, it's available in larger garden centers – but there is one significant fact you should be aware of. It is technically not an *Ageratum* but a close lookalike with its different Latin genus name. It is called ***Conoclinium coelestinum***, better known as the **Hardy Ageratum**, and you can read about it later.

Amsonia – Eastern Blue Star

Amsonia tabernaemontana



Some perennial plants become instant celebrities, like hostas, daylilies, iris, and chrysanthemums. In contrast, others remain relative “nobodies” overlooked or unappreciated for garden acceptance. Amsonia is one of these “unknowns.” That is unfortunate since it is native to the eastern half of the USA.

It grows as a mounded clump to nearly three feet, hardy from zones 3 to 9, blooms abundantly in mid-spring, is deer-resistant, drought-resistant, and is low-maintenance. What more can we ask for? One thing that comes to mind is having attractive blue flowers; this plant shows off this color remarkably well.

Amsonia's blossoms are star-shaped wonders, and mature plants have plenty of them. The species boasts a delicate pale to powder blue, while newer varieties, a testament to the interest it has sparked among plant breeders, showcase deeper blue shades. **Blue Ice**, for instance, mimics the compacted ice of a glacier, while **Blue Star** ventures into a darker blue, almost purple, shade. These flowers are a true marvel of nature.

By early summer, the blooming ends (breeders are working on extending the bloom time), and the plant spends the rest of the growing season absorbing sunlight to provide energy for another spring of even more growth and bloom. But let's realize that most other perennials do the same routine. Amsonia goes one step further in changing the color of its narrow willow-shaped leaves to bright yellow by late summer or early fall. Well, daylilies don't do that, so let's no longer discount this perennial!

You should be able to find potted plants of the species and brighter blue varieties in larger garden centers or online nurseries. Seeds are not an option; they take too long to germinate and mature.

For best growth and bloom, grow the plants in the sun to partial shade and well-drained fertile soil. In a drought, the plants will appreciate one good watering each week. It makes a pleasant companion with other perennials for any border, including at the edge of wooded areas.

Aquilegia – Columbine

Aquilegia caerulea; vulgaris



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Columbine is a must-have for your flower beds and borders. Thriving in zones 3-9, it excels in partly shady spots like woodland edges, rock gardens, and borders. Most species and varieties flourish in well-drained, fertile, moist soil, but they can also endure drier conditions. If exposed to full sun, it requires consistently damp soil.

Columbine blooms with beautiful, spurred flowers for several weeks, starting in mid-spring. The word “spur” is botanical jargon (not referring to the star-shaped cowboy boot doohickeys) but to tubular

petal extensions that store nectar to entice pollinators. They self-seed aplenty wherever they find a site ideal for their growth.

There is a caveat: They have a wide color range and seem to cross-pollinate religiously to form many multi-colorful hybrids. Suppose you wish to grow a specific species or unique color only. In that case, you must prevent other colors and species from growing nearby. Growing and maintaining specific blue to purple types in your flower garden is essential here.

The **Rocky Mountain Columbine** (*Aquilegia caerulea*) is a native species that people have been growing for generations. As shown in the above photo, this beauty is renowned for its stunning sky blue and white blossoms, adorned with vibrant yellow stamens. It's native to the mountainous regions of the western USA and Canada, a testament to its resilience and adaptability. Nature's genetic tinkering sometimes results in populations (and the seeds they produce) with deeper blue and white petals.



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Many of our columbine varieties offered in seed catalogs and garden centers are of the *Aquilegia vulgaris* species. Do you wish to find and grow a deeper all-blue flower variety? You can't go wrong by growing **Melba Higgins**, as shown above. Many online sources offer seeds and potted plants. Oh my, this is an outstandingly beautiful type! Some growers describe the flowers as being cobalt-blue or midnight-blue. My interpretation is of being “true-blue squared” (in an obscure floral-algebraic slant.)

The young spurs may have some wine-purple hues but eventually become all blue. Even the leaves have a blueish-green cast. There are reports of it self-seeding to create similar color look-alikes throughout a garden—as long as no other *Aquilegia* species or varieties are nearby to cross-pollinate with it. Then, you would get many potentially hideous mixed-up colors.

Forget about finding many Columbine species in garden centers. Your best bet to locate more blue-flowered species and self-colors is from online exotic seed and plant suppliers. You can raise them from seed, even though they can be a challenge to germinate. They need a cold and moist period (stratification or over-wintering phase), and then they will germinate the following spring. Good things bloom in gorgeous blues for those who wait!

Arctotis – Blue-Eyed Daisy

Arctotis grandis



Yes, I know – this flower is not all blue, but it does have one striking feature that is not exhibited by many other flowers (including those with blue-petaled blossoms). This one earns praise for having an attractive sapphire blue center cone surrounded by a light-yellow ring or band.

This daisy's petals are off-white; some gardeners call it pearl-white, for they have a slight iridescence – thus the less-common nickname of **African Pearl Daisy**. I adore the name and this plant! Photos do not give it justice for the radiance of the petals and that mesmerizing blue cone.

This species comes from South Africa and is a tender perennial. For many gardeners, it is an annual. It loves as much sunlight as possible and well-drained, fertile soil. It also likes to grow in hot and semi-dry locations. You would be very disappointed if you planted it for evening garden enjoyment. Unlike most other daisies, this species closes its flowers for the night and reopens them at dawn. It must feel the evening chill and wrap itself up for the night.

Although it produces many flowers over the summer, it can become untidy and spindly unless you clip back the spent blossoms. Doing so makes it create more flowers and form a better-looking plant. Speaking of which, try to grow many plants – one or two do not give a great display. They quickly 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. This daisy is well worth growing!

Aster (or Symphyotrichum)

*Aster dumosus or dumosum, or
Symphyotrichum dumosus (or dumosum) and
other confusing names*



Botanists are constantly changing the Latin name of common garden plants, and now it's Aster's turn. Now we have to relearn a new genus name (or names)! Lord, help us all! Oh, forget about it! Let's stick to naming an Aster, an Aster. Now I can sleep better.

I think there's never a disaster growing an Aster in any garden. Botanists call Asters, Daisies, Chrysanthemums, and related daisy look-alikes "composite flowers." They all look like one enormous flower but

are constructed of many smaller ones. More colorful and showy ray flowers surround the central disk of tubular blossoms.

From the Latin word meaning “star,” Asters bloom in late summer and into fall. If you need an all-purpose, hardy, and carefree plant, you cannot go wrong with having them in your garden. Although they bloom alongside Chrysanthemums, they are more vigorous than the “mums.” Their flowers are an outstanding blue to purple.

One additional attribute is that asters are much easier to take care of. You plant them in a sunny, well-drained, fertile ground and let them become a bushy mass of powder blue to purple blossoms. How easy is that? Most varieties are hardy from zones 4 to 8.



New types are being selected each year with various colors and growth habits. A new variety is **Sapphire Mist** (*Aster dumosus* or *Aster dumosum* — even the growers and sellers get confused about exact names). This type, shown above, has dazzling blue daisies from

midsummer to fall and grow as a cushion or low-growing mound. By all means, plant it with Chrysanthemums for a rainbow of vivid autumn colors.

Baptisia – Blue False Indigo

Baptisia australis



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True Indigo (*Indigofera tinctoria*), known worldwide for centuries, is a valued member of the leguminous pea-bean family. It provides vivid blue colorants used as dyes. This dye was (and still is, for lesser occasions) valued for coloring cloth fabrics in various shades of blue. It is the processed leaves that provide this dye. Marco Polo was the first European tourist to visit India to learn of this process and couldn't wait to report to everyone how to grow this tropical plant and extract this concentrated dye.

Word of his discovery quickly spread, and the blue and purple dye suddenly became the rage throughout the then-known world. Fabric manufacturers were coloring clothes, window drapes, curtains, and blankets. At the same time, artists used it as a concentrated pigment to brush on canvas. Ultimately, for most laboring people, the first fabricated denim blue jeans made by Levi Strauss in 1853 used this dye.

Only some people could grow indigo plants or purchase the expensive concentrated dye. Eventually, people discovered **False Indigo** (another legume) as a passable substitute. This exceptionally hardy (zones 3 to 9) perennial plant can grow in more temperate locations and tolerate drier and even less fertile soil. In the early days of the 18th century, this plant could produce plenty of cheap deep blue dye. Even gardeners then valued the grand displays of light blue to deep blue/purple blossoms during the summer—and guess what? —so can you. Hooray!

Baptisia is native to the eastern USA, but later, through the popularity of the knockoff indigo blue dye it produces, it grew worldwide. For our gardening purposes, it thrives in any setting you wish for it to showcase those gorgeous pea-like blossoms. It can grow to nearly four feet and almost as wide when fully established. Some gardeners and botanists classify it as an herbaceous shrub when mature. Thus, we need to plan for these future space limitations. The flowers abundantly bloom on long stems from mid-spring to early summer. One bonus for us is the black seed pods are helpful for creative dried flower displays.

Although the plant can survive drought, it prefers a sunny to lightly shady growth area, has few insect and disease problems, and is very hardy. However, it has a few quirky habits that frustrate many gardeners. From sowed seed to first bloom, it can take nearly five years. During this time, it develops an extensive root system and above-ground leafy growth. Even garden center potted plants will still delay blooming for two to three years.

Another troublesome trait is this extensive root system. You will find it difficult to transplant a fully grown plant when it is dormant. Even if you succeed, damaging the long roots will delay further bloom for a few

years. The lesson here is to be sure where you wish the plant to grow and leave it alone—permanently.

To make matters worse, Baptisia is notorious for “flopping over” to the ground when grown in a shadier location. This plant requires plenty of sunlight for the best upright growth and bloom. Some old-timer gardeners recommend inserting supportive metal hoops (like those to hold up peony plants and their heavy blooms) to keep the stems and flowers upright.

Borago – Borage or Starflower

Borago officinalis



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Remember the old saying, “happy as a kid in a candy store”? Welcome to the botanical candy store for many bees — especially honey bees. Each azure-blue, star-shaped blossom contains what may appear to any bee as a cup of nectar. Multiply this cup by several thousand flowers over the summer, and you can understand why this easy and fast-growing annual herb is any pollinator’s dream plant.

Although you can include this plant in a flower garden, gardeners have historically assigned it to the vegetable garden for these blue flowers, for they can add the leaves to salads or steep them as tea. I have not

indulged in its eating ability, but the flowers and young leaves taste and smell like cucumbers. But don't eat too many (especially the leaves), for they can become toxic. People have used the plant medicinally for centuries to cure several ailments. Still, I recommend contacting your GP doctor before attempting self-medication.

There are a few dissatisfying things about borage. One disadvantage (for us) is that these flowers hang downward, diminishing the view of their gorgeous blue color. Another disadvantage is it is messy to the point of becoming weedy. The plant becomes top-heavy with flowers and can flop this way and that. Pulling up old plants is advised to prevent excessive seed dispersal.

Garden seed catalogs commonly offer borage, but garden centers rarely sell it as starter plants. The plants grow best in full sun but partial shade in hot climates. Avoid overly fertile soil since this will make the plants even weedier and produce fewer flowers.

Brachyscome – Swan River Daisy

Brachyscome iberidifolia



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

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

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

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

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

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

Browallia

Browallia speciosa or *Browallia americana*



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

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

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

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

Brunnera – Siberian Bugloss or False Forget-Me-Nots

Brunnera macrophylla



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At home in shady, woodsy locations, this zones 3 to 8 perennial groundcover has gorgeous, bountiful clusters of small, azure blue flowers with yellow centers in the spring. These blossoms are showy for several weeks and resemble *Myosotis sylvatica* Forget-Me-Not flowers (described later), which are sometimes mistaken for them. Well, that is not bad, considering both types are beautiful.

Brunnera thrives in partial to entirely shady areas. Still, the soil must be constantly moist, well-drained, and fertile. The plants appreciate

morning sunshine but avoid hot, bright afternoon locations, for they will suffer by developing brown leaves. Individual plants grow to about one foot tall and wide, forming an attractive mound. Over time, neighboring clusters will grow together and look like a green and blue carpet in the springtime sun-dappled shade. What an unforgettable sight!

With so many flowers produced, there is also a respective abundance of seeds, which helps to spread this plant to many new areas. However, forming new colonies for shady areas that lack beautiful flowers (especially blue ones) is okay. I am unsure if garden centers sell these plants, but you can purchase seed packets.

Buddleia – Butterfly Bush

Buddleia davidii



With the common name of this plant, what more do we need to know? We all love the flowers that make butterflies happy. For years, gardeners observed our large-winged insects gravitate to the colorful and highly fragrant flower spikes. They will feverishly flutter about, inserting their coiled proboscis into the tiny florets.

Are some butterflies attracted to specific colors of Buddleia? Scientists have discovered it depends upon their species — some prefer white, others pink, while others like blue. Since this ebook is all about blue, check your local garden center for a recently released variety called **Pugster Blue®**. This is a smaller growing type (up to three feet and equally wide) with sky-blue, or the breeders describe it as true-blue

florets with the usual orangish central eye in each blossom. **Nanho Blue** is an older, but still popular, variety with a similar blue coloration but with a substantially larger growing habit.

If you wish to purchase a rarer variety, look for **Buddleia Podarasnga3 PP31799**. Fortunately, it is commonly sold as **Blue Ribbon** for easier pronunciation and remembrance. This one is unique because it has semi to fully double petal florets and is periwinkle blue. Some descriptions suggest the color is more toward a true blue without any purple overtone. I have not encountered this variety, so it is on my “gardening bucket list” to find and, hopefully, grow.

Another rare variety is the fantastic variegated **Butterfly Gold**, shown in the photo above. I had to hold off on the suspense of you wondering what the name of this butterfly bush was. The leaves have heavy variegation, with golden yellow changing to white borders and gorgeous blue flower spikes.

When you visit your nearest large garden center, a world of blue-flowered to purple types awaits you. They offer a wide selection of colorful and potted varieties, making finding the perfect Buddleia for your garden easy. Don't bother growing these shrubs from seed — it takes too long to develop into a blooming-sized age.

Regardless of their color, all varieties share a common trait — a profusion of tiny florets that burst into bloom from midsummer to fall. These flower spikes emit a delightful fragrance, a blend of citrus, honey, and pine. However, your nose might detect a different scent.

Buddleia plants are hardy in zones 5 to 10 and thrive in full sun and rich soil. They are disease and insect-free, but they are sensitive to extreme cold. The top growth may die back in northern climates after winter, but it will quickly regrow from underground shoots in early summer. Avoid over-fertilizing the soil for better winter cold survival.

Callistephus – China Aster

Callistephus chinensis



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

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

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

Like many other annuals, these plants quickly germinate from seed and grow. With proper care, they can bloom for most of the summer. The key is to provide the best growing conditions. They thrive in abundant sunshine and fertile, moist (but not constantly wet), well-drained soil. By understanding their preferences, you can confidently create the ideal environment for them to flourish.

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

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

Campanula – Canterbury Bells; Bellflower

Campanula persicifolia; Campanula medium



These popular annual, biennial, and perennial petal-forged bells will colorfully toll in your flower garden with gorgeous blue, purple, pink, or heavenly white displays. The blue floral types are always an attention-getter.

You will probably enjoy growing Canterbury Bells more than reading Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (except the more "bawdy" stories.), Those dangling petaloid bells will create silent rapture when they bloom abundantly in your garden.

These plants have long been recognized as a necessary addition to any cottage garden. They bloom from late spring to midsummer, usually on two to three-foot-tall stems. They prefer to grow in well-drained but moist, humus soil in partially sunny locations. The most essential winter requirement is that the ground be well-drained to prevent root and growth-crown rot.

Like most other garden flowers, these plants can self-sow aplenty with abundant seeds. Periodic trimming of spent spikes is beneficial to prevent overseeding your garden unless you situate your plants near a woodland setting. Here, you can let Mother Nature spread new plants with abandon to naturalize an area. That's when they show their most spectacular displays. Most *Campanulas* prefer their natural outer woody environments.

There are a tremendous number of species and varieties of bellflowers, so to save time in reading and researching, let's concentrate on one popular perennial species and a biennial species to add to your garden.

Campanula persicifolia, or the **Peach-leaved Bellflower**, is hardy from zones 3 to 7. Most *Campanulas* prefer to grow in cooler conditions and areas but are less tolerant to heat. That said, summer heat in any location will diminish flower production unless the plants have partial afternoon shade and regular watering. Well, don't we all feel the same during a hot summer's day? This popular perennial can grow to three feet (or more) and is bushy, providing an abundance of bell-shaped white to blue blossoms.

Campanula medium is historically referred to as **Canterbury Bells**. This biennial species produces many bell-shaped flowers from late spring until midsummer (if it is not too hot). Their coloration is classic pink, white, and the always popular blue-to-purple shades. For this biennial species, make sure to sow seeds two years in a row to establish a yearly blooming cycle.

For whom these bellflowers toll will always be joyfully appreciated. Sorry, I could not resist another bell reference.

Caryopteris – Bluebeard, Blue Mist Shrub, Blue Spirea

Caryopteris x clandonensis



By late summer or early fall, little blooms except asters and chrysanthemums. Most herbaceous shrubs are declining, and the blooming flowers look bug-eaten and frail. Fortunately, this two—to three-foot-tall, mound-shaped, semi-woody shrub is a welcome sight to grow in any zone 5 to 9 garden, providing a splendid lavender-blue display.

You should realize that a plant with several nicknames must be popular, and Caryopteris is no exception. The Blue Mist name refers to the abundance of the powder blue blossoms clustered around the

uppermost silvery-green leafy stems. From a slight distance, the appearance of the extended stamens resembles the bluish mist from a waterfall. The Blue Spirea nickname is an apparent reference to the small blossom clusters of the unrelated Spirea shrub. The other common name is more questionable if you stare at a single flower. The base or lower petal has the cartoonish look of a jagged or serrated beard.

By planting Caryopteris, you're not just adding beauty to your garden but also providing a vital food source for pollinators. The thousands of blue blossoms are a beacon for bees, butterflies (especially the migrating Monarch), and the southward-bound hummingbird, offering them a much-needed 'sugar fix.'

Plant Caryopteris in plenty of sunlight and well-drained soil. Avoid adding fertilizer to the soil, which will cause less blooming and more leafy stems. It can fit nicely in any border, for it grows less tall and wide but will die back to the ground during the winter. Trimming the stems in warmer climates before new growth starts in the spring is best.

Once fully established, it can be maintenance-free, tolerate drought conditions, and become deer, insect, and disease-resistant. What more reasons can we ask to add this shrub to any garden?

You can plant the oldy-but-still-goody, commonly grown type or other selections offered in larger garden centers. One recent variety is **Beyond Midnight®**, which has more compact growth, dark green leaves, and a more pronounced display of deeper blue (possibly purple?) blossoms. Landscapers and garden center workers agree that this type may be the best Caryopteris available for all flower gardens. Well, you must decide if they are correct or "just hype." Let's all grow it, for seeing is believing.

Centaurea – Bachelor Buttons or Cornflower

Centaurea cyanus



Gardeners have always considered this annual cottage garden plant a favorite for its colorful flowers. Each plant produces extensive displays, resulting in long-lasting flowers all season. Once considered an agricultural weed, it eventually became a cherished garden flower. It is effortless to grow in any garden, for the seeds are easy to sow—just scatter and lightly cover with the soil. The plants will thrive in well-drained, fertile soil and as much sunlight as possible.

Cornflowers make beautiful cut flowers and can last a long time (possibly over a week) in a vase of water. They can have single or

double petals, and the colors range from intense blue to purple, pink, red, and brilliant white.

This flower reminds me of the old Hans Christian Andersen tale of the ugly duckling turning into a beautiful swan. No one liked this flower, but people eventually accepted it over time, possibly because it produced so many flowers over the summer.

It was once a fashion accessory for men, associated with inserting a flower or a small bouquet into the buttonholes of men's jackets or coats. It became known as Bachelor's Buttons. That was a fashion statement from years ago and is now considered "nerdy" or "effeminate" by today's standards. Today's men's fashions—if you can call them that—are dull and "lifeless."

The flowers are terrific for picking, especially since that fantastic blue color is so attractive. Hey, you can't have enough blue flowers in any garden!

Seeds are available in almost all seed catalogs and garden centers. Some nurseries will even offer potted plants, but you get more bang for your buck by sowing lots of seeds in your garden.

Centratherum – Brazilian Bachelor Buttons

Centratherum intermedium camporum



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

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

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

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

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

Ceratostigma – Plumbago

Ceratostigma plumbaginoides



I first fell in love with this China-native perennial plant, which covered a large patch of ground under a cluster of small trees. The multitude of sky-blue blossoms was mesmerizing. All blue flowers are eye-catching, but these were a “perfect” true blue.

Plumbago is an excellent choice for partially shady locations. You can plant it in full sun, but the leaves and flowers develop a pale color, especially in hot climates. In a partially shady location, the leaves are deeper green, and the flowers are bluer. The plants should never grow in deep shade or soggy soil conditions.

Hardy to zones 5 to 9, this plant is late to leaf out in spring and may fool you into thinking it is dead. The intermingling stems are brown, but by late spring, fresh growth begins. By midsummer, those five-petaled Honolulu-blue flowers bloom. This display continues until fall when a surprising change occurs to the leaves. They transform to a brilliant reddish-orange color.

Although this plant does not have evergreen foliage, you can use this late-awakening foliage by underplanting it with spring-blooming bulbs. The bulbs will grow and bloom before *Plumbago* begins active growth. Hey, you get two colorful floral displays for the same ground area. By fall, you get the bonus of enjoying those colorful leaves.

Be prepared to take necessary maintenance measures to contain growth, as the plants spread through underground rhizomes, which could become unmanageable when grown in fertile soil. The shoots will spread horizontally, but the flower stems grow vertically, so try to prevent walking on this ground cover.

Cichorium – Common Chicory

Cichorium intybus



I have to admit—this is one of my favorite blue-flowered plants, even if it is a roadside weed. A stunning member of the aster family, it sports many bright sky-blue or robin's egg blue flowers from late spring to fall. There are occasional colonies of white blossoms (which I have seen and regret never stopping the car to collect some seeds) and the elusive rare pink type.

The plants are biennials, beginning as vegetative plants and blooming the following year. That's the usual rule, but it breaks some rules. The plants will grow as annuals or perennials if the conditions are ideal.

No matter how they grow, viewing miles of these gorgeous flowers (interspersed with wild orange Daylilies or Oxeye Daisies) along the roadsides during the summer is stunning.

You typically see these plants growing by a road, although they can also grow in abandoned farm fields, pastures, and railways. From these areas, you can deduce that they prefer growing in full sun and gravely dry soil. Like most “roady” plants, they also tolerate salt-laced and heavy metal-enriched roadside conditions.

Originating across Europe and Asia, botanists recorded Chicory thriving in the USA Midwest by the mid to late 1800s. Classified as a weed, there appears to be a consensus that it is not an evil, invasive “thug” ready to terrorize every square inch of land.

I only notice this plant (in full bloom) near local country or suburban roadways. I also find it amazing that this plant has not been “upgraded” into the limelight of being bred into colorful garden flowers. It’s so distressing to be an overlooked individual.

Although dismissed as a potential garden icon, Chicory has developed a unique talent. It is not the flowers but its roots—roasted roots, that is. People chop the thick roots, dry them, and then roast and grind them to become a coffee substitute or additive. As of this writing, I have not yet sampled a cup of Chicory coffee. I hope to sip some and raise a clump of garden-grown plants someday. How about joining me?

Clematis

Clematis hybrida; viticella



These stunning beauties are a top choice for those seeking a vibrant garden display. Clematis vines never fail to impress, whether trained on a trellis, pergola posts, fences or even intertwined with other shrubs like climbing roses for a more naturalistic look. With a range of species and varieties, they offer a kaleidoscope of colors and blooms from spring to fall, making them a must-have for any gardener.

Several species of clematis bloom from late spring to fall, including the popular, vividly colorful summer blooming and dinner-plate-sized varieties. For our purposes here, look for '**Ramona**' or '**William Kennett**' for their sky blue to delft blue shades. They have large dinner-

plate-sized flowers for all summer bloom and are hardy from zones 4 to 9.



Another popular blue-flowered Clematis is **Betty Corning**, shown above. In 1932, someone discovered Betty, a hybrid of two species, growing in a garden in Albany, New York. She is amazingly hardy from zones 4 (maybe 3) to 9, fast-growing, can climb and twine to over ten feet tall, and is bushy.

All summer until the first fall frost, she provides an abundance of bell-shaped, single-petaled, sky-blue to violet-blue, nodding blossoms. An additional treat is that they release an alluringly sweet fragrance. Betty is one of only a few rare large-flowered types that are fragrant. It is a battle between your eyes and nose to appreciate which one is the most striking feature of this exceptional Clematis.

She will need a sturdy support structure and plenty of room to grow and develop. Experts suggest that trimming the cluster of the previous

year's stems back to a foot from the ground in the spring will stimulate a more vigorous and busy growth habit. That translates into providing more of a bounty of those blue fragrant flowers.

Betty may prove difficult to locate in garden centers, but specialty online nurseries will undoubtedly have her available. Why not adopt her to your loving "forever home" flower garden?

Your favorite nursery or garden center may offer these three types and others. Many rare species and cultivars (types) are also available from online and mail-order nurseries.

When caring for Clematis, avoiding damaging the stems, such as bending them or damaging the thin bark, is essential. This breakage will only cause the vines to experience a significant setback to develop well. Try to purchase undamaged vines and be very careful when planting.

These vines must climb on sturdy support in as much sunlight as possible with fertile, well-drained, and mulched soil. Mulching helps cool the roots but also retains moisture and controls weeds. With these care tips, your Clematis should thrive in your garden.

Patience is vital for growing Clematis. These vines are not quick growers; it may take two or more years to become established and bloom. But the wait is worth it for the color they bring to your garden.

Most Clematis species and varieties are slow to wake up in the spring after winter slumber. This lethargy can cause concern for new gardeners, who may think the vines are dead. Allow them enough time to awaken.

Clitoria – Butterfly Pea Vine

Clitoria ternatea



If this ebook had the same rating system as movies and television shows, it might include something like this: *“Rated PG-13. Parental guidance is advised.”* What makes this vine so unique to allow such a cautionary rating?

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

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

Today, this plant grows wild in many tropical areas around the world. It doesn't appear invasive—surprising, for many vines can become so in non-native regions of the world—the tendrils twirl about, wrapping around any supporting structure. Under the best growing conditions, such as plenty of sunlight and fertile and moist soil, it can climb to over 10 feet tall. It is not a giant but makes a great, fast-growing, long-blooming annual.

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

Conoclinium – Hardy Ageratum; Blue Mistflower

Conoclinium coelestinum “Wayside”



As promised in the Ageratum section, this plant resembles our common Ageratum varieties but is a hardy perennial from zones 5 to 9. Think of it in military rank terms – while Ageratum is an Army private, this plant is a general. It pulls rank for having larger powder blue to pale purple, fluffy flower clusters with taller stems. It can spread outward – possibly to the point of being an overbearing groundcover. Well, generals tend to be domineering in many respects.

Prolific blooming begins in late summer and lasts until a killing frost. Besides the fall-blooming asters described above, this plant is one of

the last blue-blooming delights to showcase your flower beds and borders this late in the growing season. While you may have some leftover annual Ageratum still managing to hold onto a semi-respectable display, this two-foot tall and wide perennial will provide abundant blossoms for the remaining growing season.

Before publishing this ebook, I took a leisurely early fall stroll in a public arboretum. I happened to zero in on what I assumed was a bed of Ageratum. I thought how unusual and delightful it was to see this prolific blooming. I was shocked to see the identification tag listing it as not a regular Ageratum but a perennial Ageratum. "*Where have you been all my life, you magnificent plant!*" I was also confused about its Latin name, which did not conform with the regular Ageratum genus name.

It was time to dive into the pool of research and discover more information about my new love interest to add in any garden. Always keep your eyes and mind open to unexpected discoveries of new garden plants, especially when you think you know about everything that is currently blooming. It's these small joys that make life enjoyable.

Convolvulus – Bush Morning Glory; Dwarf Morning Glory

Convolvulus tricolor “Royal Ensign”



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I pleasantly suffer from “Shiny Object Syndrome.” When viewing any flower garden, I also exhibit a similar condition called “Blue Flower Syndrome.” Any shiny, glittery object or vivid blue flower instantly attracts my attention and mesmerizes me.

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

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

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

You can find seeds in any catalog, website, or garden center. Strangely, none are offered as starter plants in nurseries or seen displayed in any garden. One explanation I can think of is that it's referenced as a Morning Glory. Technically, it is not a true glory but a relation. It forms a slight vining habit, but most growth is mounded. This plant grows to a foot tall and twice as wide on average. Unlike a morning glory, it blooms all day and non-stop until a killing fall frost. What's not to like about those qualities?

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

Corydalis – Fumewort

Corydalis flexuosa, elata, and several more species!



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Surprisingly, Corydalis is a member of the Poppy family. When you think of poppies, you visualize their large, wide-open four petals. Corydalis, however, has a smaller fused tubular petal alignment and a sweet fragrance for added flair.

Native throughout the Northern Hemisphere, especially in the mountain valley regions of China, some species extend into the temperate woods of North America. Curiously, most species are precisely limited to growth zones 6 to 8. They are sensitive to severe

cold, heat, and humidity. Think of it as a Goldilocks flower—dislikes too cold and too hot—but the right suitable locations. *Corydalis* is not limited to temperature; most species are limited to blooming in late spring and extending to early summer.

So, why bother trying to grow this multi-species genus? Well, one thing is that their gorgeous flower colors range from white to yellow, red, pink, and white—and yes, magnificent blues and purple. *Corydalis flexuosa* '**China Blue**' is one to seek for its stunning sky-blue clusters of blossoms atop a bush of ferny greenish-blue leaves. This species usually has a height of under two feet when fully established.

Care for a deeper blue variety? Then grow '**Blue Heron**,' with the largest flowers sporting dark blue (purple in some eyes) atop reddish stems and blue-green leaves.

Corydalis prefer growing in partly shady or sun-dabbled areas and well-drained fertile soil. By mid-summer, the plants will begin dormancy, die back, and rest until next spring.

Garden centers may have potted plants available, but online nurseries specializing in rare garden plants will. Seeds are not a reliable option; they must be fresh but still have unreliable germination. Some seeds of various species take a couple of years to germinate.

This sounds like a “mission impossible” plan to include these gorgeous blue flowers in your garden, but don't give up. As long as you have a shady, well-drained area and some protection from severe ground freezing and drought locations, you should have an excellent chance to raise these outstanding perennials. Not trying guarantees you no success.

Delphinium - Larkspur

Delphinium elatum



This popular biennial / perennial is a favorite occupant in any flower garden. You can easily recognize them in photos or drawings of old-fashioned cottage gardens with those towering flower spikes. In some areas of the world, their other common nickname is Larkspur, which can confuse many gardeners when referring to the annual species.

The most popular flowering varieties are sky to cobalt blue or purple. Still, lighter shades of sky blue, pink, and pure white are also available for home gardeners.

As a popular hardy plant (zones 3 to 8) for gardens, they are easy to grow. Well, that is not always the case. It can be a challenge to raise

them from seed and grow to “adulthood.” When sowing seeds, you must provide them with a cold, moist period. Many perennials need this frigid experience for seed germination and proper spring and summer development.

These plants prefer cooler summer areas, regularly moist and fertile soil, and less windy locations. These requirements rule out several regions of the world. But take heart, for new hybrid varieties, bred over the years, have adapted (to some extent) to less favorable conditions. These more modern types have sturdy stems supporting excessive floral-enhanced spikes. If your garden is occasionally exposed to strong winds, it is still best to stake the stems.

Most Delphiniums can bloom all summer, but only if you cut off the spent central spikes and allow side branching spikes to grow. They prefer to grow in plenty of sunlight but will suffer and perish if you live in arid climates. Make sure you add plenty of humus to incorporate into the ground to help retain moisture.

So, what large varieties can you sow or plant? Growers suggest the **Elatum Hybrid Strain** is currently the tallest — their floral spikes towering above six feet. This hybrid provides your usual base colors, many having semi-double petals with contrasting white, black, or brown centers (commonly called “bees”).

Another varietal group is the **Pacific Hybrid Strain**, which grows “slightly” less tall (what are a few inches among admirers?) with similar flower colors.

Eryngium – Sea Holly

Eryngium maritimum



Sea Holly can withstand climates of zone 5 and up and is a native of the sun-soaked coastal beaches of Europe. Its clumps can grow to an impressive three feet tall and wide and bloom from midsummer until fall. With their shiny appearance, the flower heads and surrounding bracts resemble large ice crystals or delicate snowflakes, adding a unique touch to any garden. It also adapts well in rock gardens or borders supplemented with gravel-enhanced garden soil.

Magnificent varieties are available, such as **Blue Jackpot**, **Big Blue**, and even a smaller type called **Blue Hobbit** (initially found in Middle-earth nurseries—sorry, a lame *Lord of the Rings* joke), which has a beautiful

blue coloration. Various nursery sources refer to the color as “electric blue.” That should spark some interest in purchasing them.

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

Years ago, wild plants were common near dunes. Today, botanists discover fewer populations because people steal them for their flower gardens. This does not have to be, for you can grow attractive varieties from seed or purchase nursery plants.

Evolvulus – Dwarf Morning Glory

Evolvulus glomeratus or Evolvulus hybrida



I came across this outstanding true-blue flowered annual when visiting a local Amish nursery. Having never encountered it before, I was curious how it would develop. The results of its prolific blooming went beyond my cautious expectations.

The particular variety I found is called **Blue My Mind®** from *Proven Winners*. The name is rather clever. It is well worth planting; it grows less than a foot tall and spreads nearly twice that height. The leaves are fuzzy, silvery-green, and excessively dotted with those eye-catching blossoms. Other similarly impressive varieties include '**Blue Daze**' and '**Hawaiian Blue Eyes**,' both of which are said to grow larger and broader but with slightly smaller blossoms.

The accolades do not stop there, as these plants adapt to hot climates and thrive in hot weather. It grows well in plenty of sunlight and well-drained, fertile soil. Continuous blooming begins from early summer to mid-fall. Dead-heading spent blooms is unnecessary, so this plant borders on being classified as low-maintenance. The “icing on the cake” is you can plant it in any location — beds, borders, rock gardens, hanging baskets, and containers.

The only thing that would make it a perfect plant would be if it were a perennial. But you can save a potted plant for the winter by transforming it into a houseplant near a sunny south-facing window.

The common name of Dwarf Morning Glory might cause some confusion. *Evolvulus* is a relative of our regular climbing Morning Glories but with a unique twist — it doesn’t climb; it gradually sprawls along the ground.

Some growers have noted that the blossoms close up on cloudy days, but I observed that my plant does not. I lucked out with a well-behaved one for my garden. Remember, instead of complaining about flowers, it’s better to compliment them.

Felicia – Cape Town Blue

Felicia amelloides



As promised earlier, there needs to be more clarity concerning this plant and another similar-looking daisy called *Brachyscome* or the Swan River Daisy described earlier. Think of this one as a doppelgänger of *Brachyscome*. For *Felicia*, it closely resembles it, even though it looks and grows in similar circumstances on another continent, in this case, Africa, specifically in South Africa. My goodness, Mother Nature is a trickster!

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

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

These plants are easy to maintain if grown in a sunny location with fertile and well-drained soil. Although they can withstand some drought conditions, it is always advisable to water them periodically (and lightly fertilize), as excessive wet soil can kill them.

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

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

Geranium – Cranesbill or Hardy Geranium

Geranium wallichianum



To avoid confusion, we do not associate these plants with the annual varieties (also commonly called Geraniums), whose botanically correct name is *Pelargonium*.

The common name of Geranium is Cranesbill, a descriptive name for the seed head that resembles a Crane bird's head and beak. OK, we'll take their word for it. These are beautiful plants; any new gardener should find a spot to grow them.

The following eye-catching blue flowering plants are offered in larger garden centers and online specialty nurseries. Look for *Geranium*

wallichianum ‘**Buxton’s Blue**,’ which has grand displays of sky-blue blossoms with whitish centers for most of the summer. This variety tends to develop as a mound but spreads as a ground cover, perfect for edging borders or carpeting smaller beds.

A distinct inter-species hybrid called *Geranium* x ‘**Rozanne®**’ is also available in many nurseries. This plant is considered the perfect blue-flowered hybrid variety you can grow for all beds or borders (even containers). Instead of developing as a groundcover, it applies all of its energy into forming an ever-expanding mound shape appearance. Rozanne has captured the attention and admiration of many gardeners and landscapers with the gorgeous blue flower displays from spring to fall. They look like ‘Buxton’s Blue’ blossoms but are slightly larger and more abundant. This variety earned the *Perennial Plant Association’s Perennial Plant of the Year (2008)*. The *Royal Horticultural Society* voted it the “*Plant of the Centenary*,” the top honor in 100 years of the prestigious Chelsea flower shows.

If these two accolades are insufficient for you to grow this plant in your gardens, I don’t know what else I can convince you. I’ll try to include a few more reasons, such as this plant is sterile – it can’t form seeds, so the plants keep forming flowers instead of seeds.

Because of hybrid vigor, you do not need to purchase several plants to fill in any particular area. One plant can expand to a three-foot diameter mound in a growing season. If the plant grows excessively, clip back some shoots. Don’t worry – the plant regrows quickly and reforms more flowers.

Like most similar hardy Geraniums, the above types are hardy from zones 5 and up. Zone 4 growers can squeak by placing the plants in a protected southern location (like a house foundation.) No matter which zone, the plants grow in plenty of sunlight and fertile, well-drained soil. Established plants can tolerate occasional dry conditions but will perish in excessively moist to wet ground.

Heliotropium – Heliotrope

Heliotropium peruvianum



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

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

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

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

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

Hibiscus – Rose of Sharon

Hibiscus syriacus “Blue Chiffon®”



Blooming by mid-summer, gardeners treasure this woody shrub for its gorgeous “satin-glow” sky-blue blossoms. The color is a glowing baby blue with a light gray overlay. It’s “eye stunning,” for want of a better description of this incredible color.

Depending on the shrub's age or development, the blossoms are usually single-petaled. Still, they will eventually form semi- to almost fully double petals. The center of each blossom has this species' characteristic reddish starburst pattern, but adding extra petals will hide it.

This is the best variety of Rose of Sharon for being low-maintenance, long-blooming, and low seed production. Like other types, this variety will eventually reach over 12 feet, but it can be lightly pruned during the winter to preserve its attractive symmetry. It is reliably hardy to zones 5 to 9 but can sustain a zone 4 winter if placed in a wind-sheltered southern location. All Rose of Sharon varieties thrive in sunny, fertile, well-drained areas.

Hyacinthoides – English Bluebell

Hyacinthoides non-scripta



Spring blooming bulbs are a blessing for those who must endure an unending winter. Tulips and daffodils will always receive top billing for this exaltation of spring, but let's never overlook other bulbs such as the big-bulb *Hyacinthus orientalis* (described next), Muscari or Grape Hyacinths (described later) and these vibrantly blue-flowered, bell-shaped flowers with their outstanding fragrance.

These fall-planted bulbs, hardy from zones 4 to 8, appreciate dappled sunlight and moist woodsy soil. Over considerable time, they will produce a naturalized, ever-expanding carpet of intense blue (or white) tubular to bell-shaped flowers. Making colorful, healthy, and showy

displays of blossoms covering a woodland requires various essential factors and requirements.

This extensive carpeting effect will only happen in your life if you speed things along by purchasing and planting millions of bulbs, but think of it as a gift to future generations. For our immediate plans, plant several near the base of a few trees or in your garden.

A closely related species, *Hyacinthoides hispanica* or Spanish Bluebells, is also available and similarly grows and blooms like the English Bluebells but does not have a fragrance like them.

Both species' flowers go dormant by early summer, when the tree leaves shade them. Their exceptional blossoms draw your attention, as do the early-awakening native bees searching for pollen and energetic nectar.

Hyacinthus – Hyacinth

Hyacinthus orientalis



Wild *Hyacinthus orientalis* bulbs became historically famous around 1562 in the eastern regions of the Mediterranean. The flowers were highly fragrant and exhibited several colors, including bluish-purple. Enterprising, level-headed Dutch merchants (who learned a valuable lesson from that Tulipmania fiasco in the 1630s) forecasted that these large bulbs would make great spring-blooming plants and began extensive hybridization projects in the 1800s. Hybridization and selection of newer types continue today.

The **Delft Blue** hybrid, introduced in 1944, has since been a favorite among gardeners. Its award-winning status is a testament to its glorious sky-blue to lilac-blue florets. Even today, it remains unrivaled

as the best (almost true-blue) Hyacinth for planting. Its availability each fall in garden centers, nurseries, and online wholesale and retail nurseries reaffirms its popularity and quality.

All Hyacinth bulbs are hardy to zones 4 to 8, fall-planted six inches deep in well-drained, fertile soil in plenty of sunlight. You can force most varieties, including **Delft Blue**, to bloom for indoor winter displays by pre-chilling them and inserting them into potting soil-filled containers or water-filled specialty glass vases. Ahhhh...I can smell that alluring, heady perfume right now.

Hydrangea – French Hydrangea

Hydrangea macrophylla



Growers label these plants as being perennials or semi-woody shrubs. Like any other perennial, they grow herbaceous but later transform into woody hollow stems by fall. They are hardy to zones 5 to 9, but lesser zones are problematic.

These plants always remind me of my high school and college chemistry classes, determining whether an unknown solution has an acidic or basic pH. It would involve adding a pH identification chemical into an unknown pH solution. If the solution turned pink, it represented a basic solution, while blue determined it was acidic. The intensity of the colors represented how low or high the pH value was. I loved

chemistry experiments involving colors. Unfortunately, mathematical equations were my downfall.

Hydrangea “flowers” have a similar method of showing distinct colors when grown in different soil pH levels. What we think of as being flowers are bracts or modified leaves. The actual flower structures are small and in the center of these bracts.

We need to acidify the soil by adding aluminum sulfate to make the prominent bracts blue while adding lime (calcium carbonate) to turn them pink. The more we add either of these soil additives, the deeper the color of the bracts. I advise caution when adding these pH-changing additives to your garden soil. They can damage or “sicken” surrounding plants from the significant change in the soil pH.

Severe cold conditions will kill the new growth buds on older Hydrangea stems. You must also be careful when pruning these plants. Cutting them back at the wrong time of the year will delay flowering for two years. My advice is to leave them alone.

We are experiencing an exciting time in gardening concerning these plants. New varieties on the market show great promise of easing fears of not “messing things up” when pruning. They bloom on growing stems and provide longer enjoyment from spring to fall.

Older Hydrangea varieties usually bloom only in late spring, with a few rare, sporadic flower clusters during the summer. Today’s varieties bloom from new growth all summer, with either large blue or pink flower heads depending on the pH of your garden soil.

One aptly named variety, **Endless Summer**, has outstanding displays from fresh growth. Other varieties with similar names have this repeat blooming capability. This variety can grow over three feet tall and wide and has sturdy stems to hold up the massive blooms.

Impatiens – Touch-Me-Not or Busy Lizzie

Impatiens namchabarwensis



Gardeners can find and grow colorful wild impatiens species instead of the typical annual Impatiens bedding plants. If you gravitate toward growing stunning blue flowers, Impatiens namchabarwensis **Blue Diamond** (shown above) will leave you gasping with breathlessness. The two-inch-long tubular blossoms are blue, electric blue, cobalt blue, and any other descriptive blue. Oh, for Pete's sake—the flowers are an honest-to-goodness heart-stopping 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)

sometimes offer plants and seeds. I longed to get this plant and one day saw it, bought it, grew it, admired it, and... you guessed it... later killed it with way too much kindness. Oh well, c'est la vie; there were other flowers to grow, but I still admire those gorgeous blossoms via the photos I took of them.

Discovered in 2003, growing in the deep Namcha Barwa Canyon valleys in Tibet, this *Impatiens* created ecstatic excitement among 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 or hot—just right—all the time. It dislikes cold climates but hates hot, sunny, and humid locations.

I mistakenly thought it needed partly shady, warm, and humid conditions that other *Impatiens* prefer. No, it prefers cool, semi-humid, shady areas with well-drained, very fertile soil. Speaking Nepalese to it could also help it thrive. It can grow well in containers that offer the same growing conditions.

A well-grown plant can reach under two feet tall and wide and display several stunning blossoms. If you are fortunate enough to obtain a plant or two, pollinate some blossoms to get some seeds, or take cuttings and root them. This plant is not hardy, so try to make it survive in a cool but partly sunny windowsill over the winter. Place the container outdoors after the threat of frost is past.

Ipomoea - Morning-glory

Ipomoea tricolor



The sheer size of the Ipomoea family's varieties and species (over 500 worldwide) is a favorite flower of Mother Nature.

Most species sport a similar tubular or funnel-like floral structure with variations in color and size. Several varieties have developed over the years, with colors confined to sky-blue, blue-purple, pastel reddish-pink, and white shades. Most flowers show a white center and a whitish or darker star pattern.

One standard feature they all share is that they are tropical plants. Yes, there is not one hardy floral soul in the entire group. As long as they

experience a warm, moist spot to set down roots, they are happy to grow as annuals.

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

No matter which variety of Morning Glory strikes your fancy, they are all impressive and easy-to-grow vines for any gardener to grow. Their seeds are relatively large (easy enough to handle) but are very hard. They need soaking in water overnight to soften the seed coats and allow them to germinate.

You can sow the seeds in small pots a few weeks before planting them outside after the last forecasted frost date. Never plant them in cold soil or during extended cool air temperatures.

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

These plants love the heat of the summer and prefer warm growing conditions, both in the air and soil temperatures. They all bloom in midsummer to the first frost.

Several varieties are available in seed catalogs, online nurseries, and garden centers. For the best "sky-blue" seed-grown variety, find and grow "**Clarke's Heavenly Blue**." First developed (or discovered) in the 1930s, this type is considered the best blue color, with large flaring petals and a central white to pale yellow funnel. It has been very popular since then and probably will be for several more decades.

Iris

Iris florentina; Iris pallida; Iris hybrida



These multi-colorful perennials have had a longstanding relationship with us for centuries. It may be due to their “unique” flower shape. Instead of the usual two-dimensional flattened and circular petal arrangement like the daisy family, these plants developed an impressive stop-and-stare-at-three-dimensional construction. Not only this, but they use a rainbow of colors to attract all eyes. Some types release a sweet grape-like fragrance. It is this trifecta of qualities that gardeners have always valued.

Explore any flower gardening catalog, website, or garden center, and you will be greeted with a cornucopia of dazzlingly colorful Iris. The variety is endless, from bulbs for a welcome spring bloom to rhizomatic

species with large early summer displays. Among these are some notable blue-flowered types that are a must-have for your flower borders. The sheer variety and availability of Iris flowers will excite any gardening enthusiast.

Let's begin with the **Florentine Iris** (*Iris florentina*) – also called **Orris Root**. It isn't easy to find but look for it in Iris specialty catalogs or websites. As an ancient species, its popularity was for the dried, powdery rhizome or the woody stem. This fine powder gives off an enjoyable violet perfume once used for potpourri and outhouse (privy) air fresheners. That's nice, but Glade air fresheners can do the same for your modern indoor outhouse today. Today, its large, light blue flowers are valued for having an incredible grape-violet perfume.

Another antique but remarkably easier-to-find species is *Iris pallida*. Its large flowers are also pale to sky blue, but the leaf blades of the two varieties have stunning variegations. The **Argentea Variegata** type has white edges, while its sister type, **Variegata**, has bright yellow edges.

Easier to find in any garden center and online, with thousands or millions of varieties, is *Iris hybrida* or *Iris germanica*. It is a mixed bag of genes – commonly called the **Large Bearded Iris** or **German Iris**. Botanists call them bearded due to the prominent fuzzy-fluffy yellow or orange hairs on the inner petals. Several types have different degrees of blueness in their large petals. Most types display from pale blue to sky blue (old homes usually have these blooming in beds and borders) and emerald blue to cobalt blue.

Then, you have a mixture of other colors, including white, to complicate deciding which variety to purchase and grow. Perform an internet search on Blue German Iris varieties and be amazed at what appears. Good luck in making up your mind about which variety and nursery to use.

Grow most Iris in full sunlight and well-drained soil. The height of the flower stems depends on the species. The Bearded Iris may reach a few feet tall and bloom in the late spring or early summer for a few weeks. Some newer selections can rebloom in the fall.

They grow from rhizomes, or horizontal, thickened stems. You plant them shallowly (horizontally with the ground), with one-half of the rhizome sticking out of the soil. You can do this from spring to early fall. Over time, new rhizomes branch outward and form compact clumps. One word of caution: Avoid stepping on them, especially during the winter. All are hardy from zones 3 to 9.

Isotoma – Star Flower

Isotoma axillaris



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

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

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

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

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

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

Jamesbrittenia – South African Phlox

Jamesbrittenia hybrid



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

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

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

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

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

Place this plant in as much sunlight as possible and well-drained soil to maximize bloom potential. Adding time-released fertilizer is always a bonus for stimulating outstanding growth throughout the summer and fall. Although listed as drought-tolerant, watering these plants occasionally (if rain is not forecast) will benefit constant blooming.

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

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

Lathyrus – Sweet Pea

Lathyrus sativus ‘King Tut’



Our common Sweet Pea (*Lathyrus odorata*) varieties seem to gain all the accolades of prestige and honor to grace our gardens with hordes of vibrantly colorful blooms. If you can find them, a few excellent sky-blue varieties exist, including **Lunar Blue** and **Blue Celeste**, both having pale-blue petals, and **Royal Blue** with deeper blue blossoms. Search the internet for seed companies that offer them.

However, the humble little pea called *Lathyrus sativus* 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, nicknamed “King Tut,” on November 4, 1922. While rummaging around Mr. Tut’s personal burial belongings (poor kid), he and his assistants found 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.

The seeds germinated, grew, and bloomed when sown into the estate garden soil. It amazed people that these seeds could germinate and thrive after 5000 years. On learning of this discovery, gardeners wanted seeds from these unique royal plants. They became known as the King Tut Pea to distinguish them from all other species or varieties. 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 that 5000-year-old seeds would not survive so long in a tomb. A more plausible story is that *Lathyrus sativus* grows in that area and throughout the Middle East, Northern and Eastern Africa, and Asia. Someone sent Lord Carnarvon some fresh seeds (or he collected himself) and grew some in his extensive estate gardens.

You can believe this story or not, but what is true is that this pea has gorgeous sky-blue to purple blossoms. Adding a few pink stripes (like marbling) 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 also for all those gorgeous, colorful blossoms.

Although the seeds are edible in small quantities, they can be poisonous if consumed in large amounts over extended periods. Stick to eating your green vegetable garden peas (*Pisum sativum*) instead, and enjoy

the beauty of this pea and our ordinary Sweet Peas for the flower garden.

Lavandula – Lavender

Lavandula angustifolia



You cannot help smiling after inhaling the fresh bouquet from this essential pale to dark blue flowered herb. Ages ago, people used Lavender as a perfume since no one took baths. Sewage always polluted the water, so no one drank it, bathed in it, or washed clothes. So, what was a smelly, dirty person to do? People could become “socially acceptable” by using the oil of lavender. The glorious scent was (and still is) used in many products needing a warm, long-lasting, pleasing aroma.

Lavender loves hot, dry, gravelly areas. Please don't pamper these plants with fertilizer and regular watering. Fewer amounts will go a long way in providing healthy, hardy, and happy plants. All are hardy

from zones 5 to 9. Grow them in full sunlight with well-drained, limestone-enriched soil.

Two excellent varieties to grow are **Grosso** and **Provence** Lavender. These types are essential in the perfume fields of the Grosso and Provence Valleys of France. The other name of the Grosso variety is “**Fat Spike**.” It is not a motorcycle gang nickname but refers to the large, plump flower spikes. The blossom color of both varieties is azure blue to violet, and the foliage is a silvery green.

You can find these variations and others in many garden centers and mail-order nurseries. Why travel to France to see and smell these enjoyable plants when they can grow in your garden? Then again, WHY NOT? Let's get packing! Visiting France is one of the socially acceptable things to do.

Limonium – Annual Statice, Sea Lavender

Limonium sinuatum “Statice QIS Light Blue”



Originating from the Mediterranean, this vibrant annual is a favorite among florists for its ability to create stunning, long-lasting bouquets. Its unique feature is the paper-like flowers that retain their color even when dried, making them a perfect addition to any home decor. The flowers themselves are small, but the calyces, or the outer ring of sepals, provide a striking display of color.

Thanks to breeders' efforts, we now have **QIS varieties** that offer superior seed germination, stronger stems, and excellent color retention. The 'QIS' in the varietal name not only stands for 'Quality in

Seed' but also signifies the plant's ability to maintain its vibrant color across various shades. This makes them a valuable addition to any garden.

This is fine and dandy if you're a florist, but how about growing in a garden? The same attributes for florists also apply to you (and me.) Plenty of cut flowers for all summer enjoyment, showcasing various colors of the rainbow, including gorgeous light or pale blue to dark blue shades, all with the characteristic white florets for bling appeal.

All QIS varieties grow to plus/minus two feet tall and wide and begin blooming by early summer to frost. If you wish to pick a florist-impressive bouquet, wait until all the florets are open and their color is the most vibrant. This ensures the stem is at its most stiffness. Place a bunch in a vase and regularly change the water. The display can last up to two weeks. Wow!

For late summer harvesting to provide dried flowers, cut the stems as before but hang the bunch upside down in a warm, airy, dark location like a dry basement. After a few weeks, display the bouquet anywhere in your home that needs some well-needed color and curiosity-sparked conversation.

You may be thinking, what's with the other common name of Sea Lavender? This name is mainly referenced to another related species called *Limonium platyphyllum*. This plant is a hardy perennial native to southern Europe around coastal Mediterranean locations. It flaunts attractive pale-blue, widely spaced florets scattered on the outskirts of wiry stems. This species tolerates harsher growing conditions such as salty wind spray and poor saline sandy soils.

You can grow these two species from seed sown in early spring and transplanted outside after the last frost forecast. I am unsure if larger garden centers sell established plants. Still, it would be good to inquire by contacting the larger businesses. These annuals are attractive when grown in a garden or showcased as dried bouquets within your home.

Lobelia – Trailing or Edging Lobelia; Annual Lobelia

Lobelia erinus



Due to its low-growing and spreading nature, this annual species is grown as a filler or edging display in any bed or border in most locations. It can also be added to hanging baskets, window boxes, and patio containers to provide additional color to other trailing plantings.

Whatever you plan to use it for, be prepared to be jolted by the shock of the intense flower colors. The most popular is sky blue, which includes a mesmerizing cobalt blue. Other colors include lilac, violet, royal purple, pink, and pure white. Each tubular blossom usually has a vivid contrasting yellow or white center “eye.”

This Lobelia prefers to grow in sunshine and well-drained, fertile soil. It can tolerate partially drier soil, but constant wet conditions will kill it. Because of its “ferocious” production of flowers, please expect a steady decline in blooming during the summer. Each plant “loses steam” to an overproduction of seeds or because summer is too hot for good growth.

You can try to cut back the plants to rejuvenate them, but be prepared to pull them out and replace the space with some other flower. It would be grand if breeders developed a sterile or virile variety that blooms non-stop until a fall frost. Maybe they have by now, but I have not learned of one.

You can purchase seeds from seed catalogs, but germination can be troublesome. Getting a plant to outdoor transplantable size can also take up to 10 weeks. Most people purchase plants grown in the plastic four- or six-cell packs offered by many nurseries and garden centers.

Lupinus – Lupin or Lupine

Lupinus polyphyllus, texensis, and other species



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We have a problem here. Is Lupin spelled with the letter “e” or not? It depends on where you live. In North America, it does, but for the rest of the world, it does not. I like Lupin better since many people pronounce it as loo-pin.

The Latin words ‘lupin’ and ‘lupus’ mean wolf or wolf-like behavior. People previously viewed the wild Lupin plants as botanical wolves, much like the predatory wolves that plagued shepherds. The wild Lupins acted as invasive weeds and overtook land that could have been used for more valuable crops. However, today, like all members of the

pea-bean family, farmers recognize their value in improving soil fertility. It's a transformation akin to a big, bad wolf turning into a beloved pet like Lassie, inspiring us with the potential of these plants in our gardens.

Over time, these plants became famous all over the world. One day, in the early 1900s, a British man named George Russell had an epiphany. You know – a light bulb above his head, brilliant idea. He thought Lupins looked “splendidly lovely” but could look better. He eventually made the famous **Russell Lupins** after many years of cross-breeding different types. They are very colorful but also have a surprising peanut or almond scent. One hot summer day, I smelled peanut butter—creamy, not chunky.

Lupins are reliable growers and prefer sun to part shade and acidic soil to grow well. They are hardy from zones 4 to 9 and bloom in mid-summer. Look for the favorite **Popsicle Strain** in seed catalogs with vivid colors and sturdier stalks that do not need staking. Try an internet search to find separate colors, such as blue (you may have to settle with purple). Several seed companies will offer a blue/white bicolor to entire indigo-blue to purple shades.

A more direct approach to finding a blue lupin is to grow *Lupinus perennis*, **Wild Lupine**, or **Sundial Lupine**. It forms branching two-foot-tall stems loaded (usually) with soft blue to deeper blue pea-like blossoms.

Another species is the **Arroyo Lupine** (*Lupinus succulentus*), which growers consider one of the easiest Lupines for all gardeners to grow. It is a native plant to California and Arizona and blooms primarily in the spring to early summer. It prefers drier conditions to grow but should do well in any garden. The blossom color is sky-blue to deeper shades. Again, an internet search will guide you to seed companies that sell packets of seeds.



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Finally, we have the old historical standby blue lupine, still an oldie-but-goody garden plant called *Lupinus texensis*, commonly called the **Bluebonnet**. This annual species is native to Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, and northern areas of Mexico. The blossoms are incredibly bright blue and may have a fragrance, depending on your nose.

So outstandingly beautiful are these flowers that billions of plants bloom in the spring near highways throughout Texas and other states for roadway beautification inspired initially and implemented by then First Lady Lady Bird Johnson. What she saw along highways around Washington DC and in their home state of Texas appalled her, so she correctly assumed other states also had eye-sore-looking roads. Overgrown grass, cast-off flat tires, trash and litter, and humongous-sized advertising billboards stretched miles upon miles for motorists to see. Mrs. Johnson had an epiphany – it was time to clean up and

improve our environment, starting with roadside beautification projects.

In 1965, her husband, US President Lyndon B. Johnson, signed *The Highway Beautification Act* into law based on her ideas and plans. The Bluebonnet was one of the first test sowings of these floral beautification projects. And they keep on blooming!

Meconopsis – Himalayan Blue Poppy

Meconopsis betonicifolia, or Meconopsis baileyi



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com. I wish I could have them blooming like this in my garden!

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

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

My other unfortunate victim is the enticing, additive, and alluring perennial temptress *Meconopsis* or **Himalayan Blue Poppy**. Climbing Mount Everest would be far less challenging than growing this gorgeous blue-flowered plant. It is temperamental in its requirements for successful raising in most gardens. Likewise, I get temperamental each time I am determined to raise hundreds — oh, let's be realistic and say at least one plant — in my garden. All I ultimately raise is my temper, muttering, "Oh, to hell with them!" and then raising a few marigolds to prove I still have the green-thumb talent of growing flowers.

One rare spring, I successfully germinated a few seeds, and they grew, to my surprise and joy. Later, at a transplantable size, I carefully set them out in a cool, moist, shady garden area. And this is where the sapphire petal anticipation ends — they eventually die. I tried to grow these flowers each spring afterward but with no luck. Oh well, maybe I will try again. This sounds like rolling the dice or playing the slot machines in Las Vegas or Atlantic City. Here, this is my version of gambling for floral beauty — and I constantly lose. Perhaps you will have better luck.

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

- Try to grow your plants from fresh seeds. Don't even try to germinate them from a 2011 seed packet. They may not germinate well from last year's seed packet, but you will have a better chance of success. Seed germination may take up to six weeks. The process of cold soil stratification may increase germination rates and time.
- If you are fortunate enough to have young seedlings and grow them to transplantable size (like any other perennial) or obtain plants from a nursery, plant them in a partly shady

location with moist but well-drained, highly fertile soil. The application of well-rotted mulch is beneficial.

- They cannot tolerate full sun and hot ground. Think cool. These plants like to grow in cool, moist conditions. If your garden can grow spring-blooming primrose, these plants should grow well for you.
- Growers advise spring planting instead of fall planting so your plants can develop a robust root system before winter.
- *Meconopsis* can act as a biennial or a perennial (hardy to zones 4 to 7), so patience is vital when expecting flowering in late spring.
- Please understand that, although named as a poppy, don't grow them like an Oriental Poppy (*Papaver orientalis*).
- Cross your fingers, hope, or pray your plants will bloom. But expect they may perish.
- Have Plan B on standby: Sow marigold seeds instead.

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

Hold your horses if you wish to gallop to your nearest garden center, for they may not sell this strain. Some online nurseries may offer it. You can also buy seeds, but germination is, unfortunately, unreliable. You should try it but not me: I know what will happen. Now, where's that packet of marigold seeds?

Muscari – Grape Hyacinth

Muscari armeniacum; neglectum and other species



They may be tiny, but they are mighty when blooming early to mid-spring. Technically speaking, Muscari is not an actual hyacinth-type bulb. The common nickname is Grape Hyacinth, which refers to the clustered, wonderfully fragrant, grape-like, small bell-shaped florets attached to a short-growing inflorescence or stem.

Most varieties are purple, but some newer types range from cobalt blue to powder or pale blue. Garden centers sell limited varieties, but to find those gorgeous true-blue types, you need to perform an internet search or obtain bulb specialty catalogs. A few varieties to plant are **Valerie**

Finnis, which has pale lavender-blue flowers, and **Baby's Breath**, which has pale blue florets.

All Muscari bulbs are small but look their best when planted in abundance in the fall. They will need fertile, well-drained soil in plenty of sunlight. These bulbs are hardy from zones 4 to 8. You can create drifts or masses of them. One popular method is to give the impression of a blue stream flowing around large rocks, trees, or other blooming beds of spring bulbs.

Myosotis - Woodland or Common Forget-Me-Not

Myosotis sylvatica



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This is an all-purpose biennial you can raise for general “cottage” gardening, rock gardens, and, more attractive, woodland gardens. Let’s face it — who can turn down growing beautiful blue flowers? This species has five gorgeous sky-blue petals highlighted with yellow centers. Some pink and white varieties are available, but the blue shades are hands down the most popular.

They are hardy biennials (to zone 3 or 4) and prolific self-seeders, to the point that they may become invasive when conditions warrant but

are not an eyesore. Being short-growing, they can spread outward as blue carpets that bloom from spring to early summer. Other Myosotis species (*M. scorpiodes* and *M. alpestris*) are available and perennial, and they bloom further into summer and early fall. Still, *sylvatica* is by far the most attractive.

These plants prefer to grow in partly shady, moist, well-drained soil. The general recommendation is that the more exposure to sunlight, the more water the plants will need. Deep shade is also not advised, but the Goldilocks Zone is when the plants grow in dappled sunlight.

If you are curious about how plants get their names, Myosotis is a dandy of a wild name-dropper. It comes from the Greek word meaning “mouse ears.” Mouse ears? OK. This plant has several small, “furry,” pointed leaves that someone thought resembled a mouse’s ear.

To further advance the name-game explanation, the common name of “Forget-me-not” apparently is from the story of a Middle Ages German knight (in shining armor, no less) who, while picking bouquets of these flowers near a stream for his fair damsel girlfriend, slipped and fell into the water and drowned.

Before his watery demise, he threw his pretty bouquet to her, and, instead of shouting, “*JUST DON’T STAND THERE. HELP ME!*” he began to cry and proclaimed, “*FORGET ME NOT DARLING!*”. And so, the common name stuck probably after law enforcement, investigating this horrible accident, concluded the bereaved damsel was innocent of manslaughter (or, to be precise, knight-slaughter.) She later wrote a best-selling romance novel about her unfortunate and tragic love affair.

Nemesia

Nemesia strumosa; Nemesia fruticans



This colorful annual appears more often in garden centers each year. It has been around for several years, but recently, people began to pay attention to the many colorful varieties. All gardeners should know these plants are easy to grow and maintain.

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

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

Whether you have a spacious garden or a cozy patio, *Nemesia* plants are a perfect fit. They thrive in various settings, from patio containers to hanging baskets and even in front of a border. Their preference for full sunlight to partial shade and fertile, well-drained soil is a testament to their adaptability. And with new hybrid types being more heat, high humidity, and cold-tolerant, you can be confident in their resilience.

Choosing which varieties to recommend can be challenging, for nurseries offer new, colorful hybrids to the public each year. My advice is to visit your garden center or perform an internet search for the best blue-flowered varieties now available.

To help your search, begin with the popular **Blue Gem** variety. From late spring until a fall frost, it grows 8 to 12 inches tall and has vibrant blue flowers.

Another type to watch for is the **Blue and White Nemesia**. Sorry, it has no catchy name. Still, the flowers are eye-catching; the upper petals are dark blue to purple, and the lower petals are bright white.

Another species, *Nemesia fruticans*, has a variety called **Bluebird** (shown above.) It has been available for years and is still popular. It is a softer blue than Blue Gem but has glowing yellow centers.

Nepeta – Catmint

Nepeta x faassenii



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Contrary to popular belief, Nepeta—specifically, *Nepeta x faassenii* or Catmint—is not a high-maintenance perennial flower. It’s one of the best investments for any garden, especially for new gardeners. The newer *Nepeta x faassenii* hybrids, with their wide variety of outstanding blooms, require minimal care and bloom practically nonstop from mid-spring to mid-fall. When established, they also tolerate drought well.

Many landscapers recommend these plants for beginner gardeners. They instantly add vibrant color to newly established gardens. These

plants will thrive if you provide them with plenty of sunlight and well-drained soil.

Is lavender hardy enough to survive your hardiness zone? If not, then this perennial is hardy from zones 3 to 8. Although the gray-green leaves smell of mint instead of lavender, the abundance of flowers throughout the growing season is rewarding as a close substitute.

For flower color, *Nepeta x faassenii* offers a stunning array of blues. Several varieties are usually labeled lavender-blue, but some venture into the purple territory. For the best blue-flowered type for a bed or border, consult with your favorite nursery or garden center. You may also find some pink or white selections, adding a touch of variety and beauty to your garden.

What is there to choose from? Several varieties, in fact, but two highly recommended varieties include **Cat's Pajamas**, which provide a proliferation of bright indigo-blue blossoms all along the stems. You would think the weight of these flowers would cause the stems to flop to the ground, but they don't—they stand at attention throughout the summer. Another quality is that the calyxes (or modified sepals outside each blossom) are purple, extending the display later in the season.

Another sought-after variety is **Cat's Meow**, which flaunts gorgeous lavender-blue blossoms. Mature plants grow shorter and form expanding mounds that fill in pathways, limited border areas, and patio containers.

Because of the abundance of flowers, these plants attract many pollinators—bees, butterflies, and even hummingbirds, to partake in the great quantity of nectar. These plants attract every creature that flies or walks on two or four feet.

There is an unfounded fear by some gardeners that because of the common name of Catmint, these plants will attract the attention of the neighborhood feline population. Not particularly so, in several observations, but an occasional pussycat may be interested. A close relation to this species is *Nepeta cataria*, commonly named Catnip. That

species is the one cats have a more significant attraction to—for some feline reason.

For our purposes, we grow Catmint more for its flower production. The hybrids may have fertility problems producing seeds. Thus, they can make more blossoms all summer. Catnip blooms less but self-seeds aplenty and is more of a foliage plant. It's not particularly attractive to us, but the leaf scent is more to a kitty's liking.

Purr-haps, I have not been purr-suasive enough to extol the virtues of this purr-fect perennial. It would be a catastrophe if you did not include it in a prime location within a garden border. I recommend you go to your garden center or nursery and get your paws on this outstanding perennial. Don't waste any of your nine lives without growing and enjoying the above varieties.

I know; please stop all this caterwauling and get on with the next plant, which is...

Nigella – Love-in-a-Mist or Fennel Flower

Nigella damascena “Miss Jekyll Blue”



Named after Gertrude Jekyll (1842 to 1932), the famous British garden writer and designer, this outstanding, highly floriferous annual displays numerous gorgeous bright blue flowers nestled within a fascinating and delightful “mess” of dangled ferny or lacy emerald foliage. When viewed at a distance, the total effect appears like blue gemstones suspended with a greenish mist or fog.

The “love” part of the nickname is self-explanatory, for this plant has been beloved by generations of gardeners. Ms. Jekyll considered Nigella (particularly the sky-to-cobalt blue varieties) “*a plant I hold in high*

admiration.” Whatever she advised or glorified, people took as gardening gospel and grew for their flower gardens.

Nigella blooms primarily in late spring or early summer with blue, purple, pink, and white blossoms. Many gardeners value the mass of misty foliage and blossoms for their ability to grow up to two feet tall and equally wide, filling in or blending with other early blooming flowers in open-spaced areas of a bed or border. Even the enlarged seed pods provide a delightful display.

With all the abundant flowers produced, a reciprocal quantity of black seeds is self-sown for further years of delight. Usually, this would be an adverse condition for several other flowering plants. Still, Nigella has a positivity of colorful value for having new generations sprouting each spring. Let’s face it... who can turn down plenty of colorful blossoms (especially blue ones) for late spring?

Nigella plants prefer plenty of sunlight and well-drained, fertile soil. They can tolerate some dry spells but bloom best when watered regularly.

Passiflora – Passion Vine; Passion Flower or Maypop

Passiflora incarnata; *caerulea*



This would be number one if you had to vote on the world's most unusually constructed flower. It signifies a crucifixion and an aphrodisiac, all in the same flower description. Go figure! The common name of 'Passion Vine' results from the notion that eating its succulent egg-sized fruit gives you romantic tendencies. The other, more acceptable passion idea concerns the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Many South Americans call it the legendary "Flower of the Five Wounds." According to historical accounts, sometime around 1609, Spanish missionaries wrote about a beautiful flower growing in the

South American rainforests that represented Christ's Passion before and during his crucifixion.

These vines use coiled tendrils to grab hold of adjacent shrubs and other supporting structures to lift themselves to heights of eight to 12 feet or more. With hundreds of species, hybrids, and varieties available for the home gardener, the flowers' size and color are limitless. While most species grow in the subtropical and tropical areas of North and South America, all can grow in colder zones if raised in containers.

A few hardy souls are called Maypops, and, as the nickname implies, they begin to bloom in late spring. One hardy representative species is *Passiflora caerulea*, commonly called the **Blue Passion Vine** (shown above). Four-inch diameter flowers with beautiful white petals ringed with blue to purple filaments appear all summer. They also have a lovely sweet perfume.

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

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

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

Penstemon – Beardtongue

Penstemon heterophyllus and many other species



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Hardy from zone 3 and up, Penstemon has many species that appear almost like Foxglove flowers. Depending on the species, their flower spikes can reach up to three feet tall, covered with flared trumpet or tubular blossoms. Unlike the flowers clustered on a Foxglove spike, these flowers extend outward. The flower colors range from vibrant red to all shades of pink, blue, purple, white, and bicolors with contrasting veins or spots.

A key question about this plant is, what's with the Beardtongue nickname? It involves the shape and function of the flower. Each snapdragon-like blossom has a strangely developed, non-functional stamen called a staminode with hair-like extensions. This odd appearance resembles a small, fuzzy beard. I know this fact is not vital to our everyday welfare, but I hate dangling question marks about nickname origins.

These plants, though, require special care to thrive in your garden. First and foremost, they need exceptional soil drainage. Constant damp or sopping wet ground is the death knell for them. Some growers report raising them in pure sand or gravel does nothing to retard growth or blooming. Gee, if only all plants were as simple to grow like that! They prefer occasional watering like any plant, but not an overabundance.

Native primarily to the western areas of North America, Penstemon have extended their range elsewhere — as long as the growing conditions are tolerable. Most species and varieties have a limited bloom time that extends from spring to early summer.

Grow these plants in as much sunlight as possible and, of course, well-drained fertile soil. Unlike most garden flowers, avoid mulching these plants to prevent retaining excess soil moisture. A rock garden would be an ideal location to raise these plants.

So, what can you raise that has various shades of blue flowers? Well, that is difficult, as several species favor this color. My best advice is to perform a browser search, like typing "blue-flowered Penstemon," and see what it displays. It will take you an hour to review the resulting web pages.

For quick reference, here are a few popular examples. **Electric Blue** is a newer California native species (selected variety) with abundant, vivid blue blossoms. It is a seed-grown perennial (zones 6 to 10) and blooms late spring into mid-summer. Plant it in plenty of sunlight and well-drained, fertile soil for best bloom and survivability.

Another bright blue-flowered species is the **Rocky Mountain Blue Penstemon** (*Penstemon strictus*.) Many growers believe this is one of the easiest-to-grow of the Penstemon species. It is long-blooming and long-lived if provided with well-drained soil and plenty of sunshine. It also exhibits excellent drought tolerance. Having the potential to grow to 36 inches, it also becomes bushy with hundreds of blossoms visited daily by hummingbirds and bees. It is “that good” for raising in any garden.

Several other light blue to deep blue and purple Penstemon are available for you to grow. Most will not be available in nurseries and garden centers, so your best option is to search for seeds and plants on specialized wildflower nursery websites and online catalogs.

You can grow these plants from seed sown in the fall (necessary for winter stratification) or purchase potted nursery plants.

Petunia

Petunia hybrida; Petunia x atkinsiana



There are over 20 species of Petunia growing in South America. That may not sound like a lot, but this genus took the world by storm when it was first discovered. The storm still rages. Go to your nearest garden center and see the recent results of all the hybrid varieties offered. There must be hundreds (well, millions, to be on the safe side) of Petunia varieties available for gardeners. They continue to enchant and tease us to grow them in our gardens.

Today's hybrid plants offer better growth and disease resistance than the non-hybrid types provided years ago. The icing on the cake is that all these petunia varieties provide excellent viewing in any bed, border, or container, and some will cascade from hanging baskets.

It was once thought impossible to accomplish, but new hybrids now flaunt most rainbow colors. There are shades of 'almost green,' 'almost black,' 'almost yellow,' (yellow is a troublesome color), spotted-dotted colors (via a wild-and-crazy genetic disorder called "jumping genes"—sounds like fun), and other mixed-up colors. These new varieties have psychedelically wild petals pigmented with contrasting white or colorful spots, splotches, and stripes.

One color has been more elusive—that being 'almost blue.' Older and some newer varieties gravitate toward gorgeous purple shades. Still, recent genetic developments have created an accurate to adequate 'that's really blue!' depending on your perspective.

One recent breeding breakthrough is **Evening Scentsation F1** (*Petunia x atkinsiana*), shown above, an inter-species hybrid of at least two species, *P. axillaris* (which is a large white and night-scented petunia) and *P. integrifolia* (a pinkish-violet-flowered petunia.)

It is a rightful 2017 AAS Flower Winner that startled judges with its powerful 24-hour sweet fragrance, and I can't believe my eye's true-blue color. One judge reportedly proclaimed it as "*One of the best blue petunias I have seen, a nice mounding and spreading habit. Excellent fragrance, too!*" Need I add further accolades?



Then, there is a radical “far beyond blue” variety called **Night Sky**. Mother Nature goes entirely “modern art” with this petunia. It is a floral representation of Vincent Van Gogh’s masterpiece, *Starry Night Over the Rhône*. The petals are dark blue to blatant purple and heavily splashed with bright white dots. It is shocking but additively beautiful since each flower displays different white spots.

If supplies last, you can purchase these two varieties from almost every garden center or nursery, for they are very popular.

All petunias need as much sunlight as possible and fertile, well-drained soil to grow and bloom well. Yes, they require regular watering and light fertilizing, but spend some time with these flowers and care for them. They will reward you with endearing acclaim, admiration (and envy) from your friends, family, and competitive neighbors.

Phlox – Woodland Phlox

Phlox divaricata



Wild Sweet Williams is the other common Woodland Phlox (*Phlox divaricata*) name. Don't confuse this with the nickname of *Dianthus barbatus*. This country wildflower became a big city garden "scent-sation." It blooms from mid-spring to early summer with hundreds of light blue or white flowers. They are lily-perfumed; if you clump all the flowers with your hands and inhale, you will be in seventh heaven. What a way to celebrate spring!

This Phlox, hardy from zones 3 to 8, requires fertile, damp but not constantly wet soil and slowly spreads on the ground by underground stems. Unlike its relative, the sun-loving garden phlox, it will thrive in

shady, fertile, well-drained ground—especially at the edge of a woodland environment.

Look for the **Blue Moon** variety, which has a slightly deeper blue flower color and bushier growth than the native wild plants. It makes a splendid, colorful, and highly fragrant groundcover. A white-flowered variant of the wild species is also available.

Garden centers and nurseries should have this perennial available by early spring. In the fall, you can dig up and separate divisions or clusters to transplant in the shady areas of your garden.

Phlox – Creeping Phlox

Phlox subulata



This fabulous hardy perennial (zones 3 to 9) will always be the most popular ground cover to plant near a house or outlining a border. It is an easy-to-grow and very low-maintenance species of Phlox. The unfortunate thing about this plant (there is always a negative feature with everything, isn't it?) is that it is slow-growing, but when planted in quantity, it will fill in an area faster.

It forms condensed evergreen ground-hugging, spruce needle-like leafy mats. By early to mid-spring, the shockingly colorful carpet of white, vivid rose-pink, pale pink, or the ever-popular pale-lavender blue petals provides a show (and traffic) stopping extravaganza display. A few available varieties have bi-color petals of pink and white.

Over the years, I have noticed some gardeners have used some imagination by using the blue-shade variety to represent “flowing” water emptying from an inverted wooden tub or barrel. Or, the blue mixed with some white petaled type represents a small, fast-flowing stream coursing down a slope bordered by a few large rocks. Let your imagination run with this plant!

By late spring, the show ends, and only that green mat of leaves remains for the remaining growing season. But that is okay, for they devoted all their energy to further growth and next spring’s fantastic bloom.

This plant performs perfectly by filling a bed or space and crowding out weeds and possibly grass.

Besides the occasional watering and light-fertilizing, this plant is a welcome, carefree addition to any garden. It grows best in as much sunlight as possible and with well-drained, fertile soil. It can tolerate some dry soil but appreciates the occasional refreshing drink of water throughout the hot summer. Well, don’t we all?

Pimpernel – Blue Pimpernel; Italian Pimpernel

Anagallis monellii “Skylover Blue”



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

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

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

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

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

All superheroes have minor character flaws; this prolific bloomer is no exception. Like its close cousin *Anagallis arvensis* mentioned above, both species close their petals at dusk, when the day is cloudy, or when a thunderstorm nears. Both species have the common nickname of Poor Man's Barometer. These plants prefer to bask in the bright sunlight.

Platycodon – Balloon Flower; Chinese Bellflower

Platycodon grandiflorus



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From its bud development to full bloom, the Platycodon plant, a popular perennial, will pique your curiosity. Its unique growth pattern is like an indelible question mark, constantly prompting you to wonder, *“What in the world is THAT?”*

Platycodon is closely related to the previously reviewed Campanula flowers. In some respects, it resembles Campanulas when in full bloom but not so when in the developing bud stage. When all five petals remain fused, it inflates slowly, like a balloon.

For some observers, the bud resembles a Chinese lantern or a round Christmas tree ornament. As the development proceeds, it grows rounder until “POP,” the petals suddenly burst open, displaying a large star-shaped Campanula-like flower. People give it the other common Chinese or Japanese Bellflower name for obscure reasons. Bells do not display a flared star-shaped appearance—maybe an exploded bell—so it makes no sense to me, possibly for you, too.

The flowers are a stunning bright lavender-blue, almost purple in some eyes, or when blooming in a shady location. But the beauty doesn't stop there. Other varieties exist, with pretty pink or white petals. The blooming season, starting in late spring and extending for several weeks during the summer, is a time of vibrant beauty. Botanists recommend periodically removing spent blossoms to prolong this beauty and prevent excessive re-seeding.

This plant is super hardy from zones 4 to 9, can grow almost two feet, and develops a mound shape when fully mature. It enjoys as much sunlight and well-drained soil for best growth and bloom. You can plant it in most areas, such as borders, rock gardens, and containers for deck or patio enjoyment. Once planted in a garden location, try not to transplant it later. Doing so drastically disturbs the root structure, and it may never recover from the shock and later die.

You can usually find small potted plants in larger garden centers or nurseries, physically or online. There are a few named varieties, but one to specifically find is called **Sentimental Blue**. It grows slightly less tall but provides plenty of those “almost” true-blue, puffy balloon balls most of the summer.

A terrific seed-grown type is also available called **Pop Star™ Blue**, which can bloom the first year when sown in early spring. It, too, showcases stunning deep-blue “balloons and star-shaped” blossoms all summer on more compact growing plants.

Plumbago – Leadwort; Cape Plumbago or Sky Flower Shrub

Plumbago auriculata “Imperial Blue”



Native to South Africa, those of you living in the southernmost areas of the USA will already know about this plant. Hardy, from zones 9 and up, grows (and blooms) non-stop in warm-to-hot climate environments.

Although classified as a woody shrub, it can act as a vine, but you need to train it to be one. It does not twine upward but forms expanding branches that can extend along the ground as a ground cover, partially cascade over a wall, or grow upward (with help) by being attached to any support, such as a trellis.

For most people, it can only be grown in a container as an annual. Even so, semi-woody young plants transplanted in late spring will bloom all summer.

When admiring its flowers, you will understand why this plant has the common name of Sky Flower. They appear as if the Phlox-like petals absorbed some of the blueness from the sky. The blue is absolutely gorgeous, to the point of being an addiction to constant admiration. Try to find the “**Imperial Blue**” variety, which has larger flowers than the species. Other forms are available, having white or pink flowers.

Grow it in sunlight and fertile, well-drained soil for the best-blooming potential. This plant can tolerate periodic dry soil, so you need not fuss over it. Don't we wish all plants were like this? For containers, try to plant them in a size larger than you originally planned to use. It's like buying a larger shoe size for a growing child.

By fall, before a killing freeze, if possible, transfer the container indoors (such as a cool, dark area of the basement) and allow the woody plant to begin dormancy. The soil should remain dry, but occasionally, the plant should be given some water to keep the roots alive. By spring, depending on your climate zone, transfer to a bright area and begin regular watering. You should then expect a larger blooming plant throughout the summer.

You may wonder why the “regular” common name is Leadwort. It was once thought that the plants (possibly the flowers) could cure lead poisoning. Please don't count on that therapy. However, it is recommended to avoid handling the plants, for they release a toxic substance resulting in a severe skin rash reaction. Some people wear gloves or wash their hands immediately afterward when planting the plants.

Once planted in the ground or a container, this plant can be considered low-maintenance, so relax and gaze at those outstanding blue blossoms. You may have trouble averting your eyes!

Polemonium – Jacob's Ladder

Polemonium caeruleum; reptans



Not every day a flowering plant gets a “holy” resemblance to a biblical reference, but hey, if it receives this nickname, it must be worth growing. And so it is—not only for being a native North American and European wildflower turned garden flower but also for the attractive symmetry of the stem leaves (thus the nickname.)

People usually refer to the popular *Polemonium caeruleum* type as European Valerian, which is native to Europe. Early American gardens considered this species a must-have garden plant, and its popularity continues today. This plant has an abundance of bell-shaped sky-blue to “pale purple” blossoms, each with a focal point of yellow anthers to focus your attention.

This plant grows to under two feet and eventually develops a mound-shaped appearance. Blooming occurs in a partly sunny perennial bed or border from late spring to midsummer (or beyond if it enjoys its surroundings).

Situating these plants in partially shaded areas produces better growth and bloom. This extremely hardy perennial (zones 3 to 8) enjoys the usual soil conditions of good fertility and adequate drainage. Still, it must have constant soil moisture (not soggy) to survive. Hot and arid locations are not to this plant's liking.

You can find seeds in larger garden seed catalogs, particularly those that focus on wildflowers. Garden center nurseries also offer potted plants, including cultivated varieties with different color selections, floral sizes, and even increased plant height.

One particularly stunning variety is **Golden Feathers**, with variegated leaves and sky-blue blossoms. It's a sight that's sure to brighten up any garden!

Primula – Primrose

Primula x polyantha; acaulis; elator; auricula; veris; and more!



Instead of going down the primrose path, remain in the comfort of your garden to view these colorful primroses. They are always a welcome sight in early spring. Most people see these magnificent flowers not in a garden but in a large nursery or garden center. For non-gardeners, this experience may happen in late winter during the numerous Home and Garden Expos. Table after table of potted, blooming primulas of all colors and shades overwhelms our eyes. Purchasing all those plants is tempting!

Some lucky plants find homes in flower gardens, but we may grow them in the wrong area. Primrose constantly needs moist soil. If the ground dries, these plants will severely wilt and may not recover. All primulas prefer partly shady locations, especially near woodlands or stream banks. They will appreciate full sunlight in early spring. As the season transcends into summer, they desperately need cool, moist, shady areas.

If you have such a space, you can plant over 400 (and counting) species and hybrid varieties available worldwide. Most species are hardy from zones 5 to 8. To save you time reading (and wear-and-tear on my typing index fingers), I will allow you to research these species more in-depth (via your preferred web browser).

There has been extensive hybridization with all these species. The greenhouse primroses (mentioned above) are *Primula x polyantha*, a cross between the *acaulis* and *veris* species. Plant them in fertile, well-drained, but moisture-retentive soil. Check your larger garden centers for other species of primulas. Seeds from specialty nurseries and seed houses usually have rare species available. Growing plants from seed can be challenging.

So, what can we plant in our shady gardens with vibrant blue petals? You can find potted primulas in garden centers, nurseries, grocery stores, and, heaven forbid, gasoline stations. You may also find some tempting blue petal forms in these locations, like one plant shown above.



If you are more adventurous and want something more eye-opening, try to find the **Blue Zebra** variety shown above in all its splendor. The best way to find it and several other gorgeous varieties is to search online.

Salpiglossis – Painted Tongue

Salpiglossis sinuata “Kew Blue”



What do you get when you cross a daylily and a petunia with a Fabergé Easter egg and a Tiffany lamp? The answer is something with a massive depreciation of value. But, if you guess the formation of this outstanding flower, you are also correct. This annual garden plant provides petunia-like, flamboyant, outlandish, and exceptionally colorful flowers. Think of it as the result of what happens when a petunia goes wild with unbelievable colors.

Introduced from the southern Chilean Andes Mountain range regions in 1824, this magnificent plant took the gardening world first by disbelief, then surprise, and finally with wide-eyed wonder. It still amazes non-

gardeners who first encounter its stunning beauty. You may have deduced by now that I love this flower — and you are correct.

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

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

These plants grow to over two feet tall in full sun to partial shade (especially in hot regions.) Having a mountainous heritage, they prefer growing in cooler conditions. Warm temperatures and high humidity will limit their full blooming potential for most of the summer. If planted in a bed, border, or container, ensure the plants grow in fertile, well-drained soil. Like petunias, if the plants get too tall and ‘gnarly,’ trim them back, and they will rebloom in two weeks.

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

Seeds are available in many seed catalogs, but I advise you not to purchase the “mixed-seed” option; flower color from mixes can be disappointing and distracting. Always buy the named varieties, such as “**Kew Blue**,” named for the world-famous Kew Gardens in England. This variety should be your first choice to grow in your garden if you love blue to purple flowers. The outer regions of each flower are dark blue but become almost purple-black towards the center. The bright yellow anthers offer a perfect focal point. This plant is the best-known and grown Salpiglossis variety.

Salvia – Sage

Salvia patens; *Salvia x guaranitica*



Salvia is also a prominent member of the Mint family, with a tremendous number of annual, perennial, and woody shrub species and varieties. These plants share common characteristics of the mints, such as square-shaped stems, aromatic leaves, and fused petals forming a tube containing sweet nectar.

The plants are spectacular in their summer-long display, but they attract pollinators differently based on flower color. Instead of displaying a rainbow of coloration, Salvia usually broadcasts two light wavelengths—red or blue—in stunning radiance. Other paler shades are available, such as orange, pink, purple, and white, but for sheer

visual excitement and jaw-dropping amazement, the brilliant red or bright blue varieties are the ones to grow.

Red flowers usually attract hummingbirds, but they also admire the vivid blue shades since the flower structure allows them to drink the sweet elixir of nectar. Bees and butterflies also visit mainly blue or purple-flowered types, especially paler-shaded varieties. Hey, all the merrier with enjoying a fresh draft of nectar!

Since this publication focuses on identifying blue-flowered types, here are two varieties you should consider growing in your garden or containers. They are unique and can only be grown vegetatively (aka stem cuttings), but not by sown seeds.

For a close “true-blue” or pale blue display of flowers, you must grow *Salvia patens*, the Gentian Sage called “**Cambridge Blue**” – shown above. This variety sports probably the largest of *Salvia* blossoms, which have a calm and cool pale blue color. To a “colorized critic” (for want of an actual name of such a critic of flower colors) like me, it doesn’t really look like the Cambridge University color — a very pale blue-gray according to my computer monitor representation. Your monitor or screen may show differently, but the flower color is a pale sky blue or a hazy blue. Still, it has an alluring, relaxing charm, easy on the eyes but demonstrates force and strength in the size of each blossom.



Another plant to grow is *Salvia x guaranitica* **Bodacious® Rhythm and Blues**, (shown above) which has the opposite effect with startling bright electric blue blossoms. This one is a shocker when in full display during the summer.

Salvia can grow from one to six feet tall and hardy from zone 4 and up, depending on the species or hybrid variety. They all share standard growth requirements: Sunny, warm-to-hot, and well-drained to dry locations. You can also grow the shorter types in containers and see the close-up of those unique blossoms and their pollinators.

Your best bet in finding these and other unique Salvia is from specialized internet nurseries raising rare plants.

Salvia – Russian Sage

Salvia yangii (formally *Perovskia atriplicifolia*)



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Botanists occasionally change the Latin names of plants. In 2017, it was time to review whether the popular Russian Sage was or wasn't a genuine member of the genus *Salvia*. Sometimes, I wonder if fistfights occur when disagreements over binomial nomenclature opinions arise.

Well, it is now determined that this plant is an official, true *Salvia* sage. Its new Latin name is now *Salvia yangii*. Whew! Now, we can all breathe a sigh of relief. One less world problem solved. In the meantime, no one uses this new name and prefers to use the old (and reliable) common

name of Russian Sage. After all, most of us do not go chit-chatting about Latin names.

Now that we have concluded this long and tedious introduction, we can focus on what makes this plant desirable for any garden. One quality is its production of (what else?) blue to purple salvia flowers loaded around long stems. It has the appearance of an abundance of tall, blooming lavender. If you have difficulty growing or keeping lavender alive, this plant can earn itself as a reasonable, colorful substitution. While lavender smells of lavender, this plant has the aroma of sage when handled. It is reliably hardy from zones 4 to 9 and needs the same growing environment as lavender.

Plant Russian Sage in well-drained soil and plenty of sunlight for best growth, bloom, and survivability. Constant wet soil spells doom for this plant, so incorporate plenty of sand or gravel. Most well-grown plants can reach upward to over four feet but are equally bushy, blooming mainly from midsummer until late fall. The whole plant becomes semi-woody as it ages, but trimming back last year's growth in the early spring stimulates fresh gray-green growth and better blooming.

For those interested in adding the Russian Sage to their garden, several cultivars or varieties are available in garden centers or online nurseries. Purchasing these varieties is often a more reliable option than growing the plant from seed. These cultivated varieties offer enhanced blue/purple coloration, increased flower production, and a more manageable growth size. Before purchasing your ideal blue variety, determine the size of your garden plot to withstand a fully grown plant. It's best to plant most types alone in a small bed or on a border's middle or outer edge, ensuring they don't overshadow smaller flowering plants.

Possible varieties include '**Blue Haze**,' which has pale blue flowers. In contrast, '**Filigran**' has a smaller size and brighter blue blossoms. '**Little Spire**' is petite or compact, growing to about two feet tall and wide with lavender-blue flowers. There are reports it can become invasive because of uncontrollable underground shoots plus excessive

seed distribution. This would be fine for more out-of-the-way beds or confined borders where nothing else grows well.

Other types are available based on size and coloration in garden centers and online nursery catalogs. To narrow the list to one popular variety, consider the *2020 Proven Winners National Perennial of the Year*® award winner, **Denim 'n Lace**. It sounds like a silly TV comedy series of mismatched police detective partners: A youthful, muscular, tough guy and a wise, elderly lady with a Victorian-like demeanor who assists in solving crimes. (I know, it's not a realistic scenario, but that's standard strange fare on television nowadays.)

Anyway, the color of the flowers is self-explanatory, but the lacy part refers to its highly curated gray-green leaves. The flowers are long-lasting throughout the summer and into the fall. The amethyst-colored bracts or calyxes holding each flower help enhance the beautiful overall coloration.

Denim 'n Lace is gaining popularity for its compact height, strong stems that don't flop to the ground, withstand poor soil fertility, drought resistance, low maintenance, and superb blue color. You can even plant it into large containers for eye-catching patio or deck displays. No wonder it is an award-winning plant! Look for it in most garden centers or online.

Scabiosa – Pincushion Flower

Scabiosa atropurpurea



This constant-blooming garden annual will supply you with bucket-loads of cut flowers all summer. It flaunts colorful petals and provides plenty of nectar for the neighborhood butterflies.

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

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

burrow under the skin epidermis. Talking about parasites will always liven up a conversation, especially if it is remotely related to the science fiction movie *Alien*. You will then enlighten them that this plant does not attract such alien mites, but rubbing the leaves on the skin helps ease the constant itchiness caused by them.

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

Oh well, back to the subject of blue flowers. This plant is low-maintenance and low-care and provides stiff, long stems. It is excellent for making impressive and inexpensive bouquets (with an average vase life of a week) from midsummer until a fall frost. What more can you ask? You can also use them in dried flower arrangements.

Scabiosa, from sown seeds to transplants, is easy to plant in the garden. Most selections are mixed colors. However, you can get separate colors from online seed catalogs, including sky blue and the popular "almost black" flower colors. Plant them in full sunlight and well-drained soil. Please don't fuss over soil fertility; less-than-ideal conditions are best for plant growth and bloom.

Most growers recommend planting it with other taller annuals to act as supports to prevent the flowers from flopping over. To keep them blooming, try to keep them from forming seeds (thus the reason for constant cutting for the house). By fall, allow some plants to go to seed. This helps to re-seed them for new growth in the spring.

For gardeners in warmer climates, it can re-grow as a perennial and form larger plants by summer. That means more flowers for the picking!

Scaevola – Fanflower

Scaevola aemula



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

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

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

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

Occasionally, seeds are available for sale, but they require a long time to germinate (because of dormancy) and gradually develop into blooming adulthood. Fortunately, more and more garden centers offer young plants each spring. I guarantee you will fall in love with this outstanding annual, just like the bees and butterflies have!

Sisyrinchium – Blue-eyed Grass

Sisyrinchium angustifolium 'Lucerne'



Embarking on botanical expeditions around the globe, one never knows what treasures await. While most of us can only dream of such adventures, there are fortunate souls with a keen eye for unique and valuable flora. A testament to this is the recent discovery of a stunning, bright blue-flowered hardy perennial thriving in a nursery near the picturesque Lucerne, Switzerland.

Sisyrinchium, commonly called Blue-eyed Grass, is not an actual grass but an Iris with grass-like leaf blades (which many members of the Iris genus share a similar trait.) This genus has approximately 90 small-grown species, most displaying small blue blossoms, and are hardy from zones 4 to 8. They are so small that most go (surprisingly)

unnoticed when blooming in the late spring. I have seen a native species growing in moist meadows near my home displaying these tiny flowers. They are pretty, but the display does not last long. What a shame, but we never know what we can discover a mile or a continent away.

The *angustifolium* species does not differ from all others. Still, someone noticed a larger-blooming variant plant in a nursery near Lucerne that displayed a larger one-inch-plus diameter, bright blue with yellow center blossoms. I am sure the loud echo of “*WOW!*” bounced repeatedly off the Alps for a while—hopefully not causing avalanches.

‘**Lucerne**’ grows to a foot tall but develops expanding clumps that may confuse you into thinking it is a small type of ornamental grass—until it blooms in late spring or early summer. Within a four-week bloom period are blankets of these vivid blue, starry flowers. After this time, only the deep green “grass blades” remain for the growing season.

Like most (if not all) Iris plants, plant ‘Lucerne’ or any other *Sisyrinchium* in plenty of sunlight and fertile and moist (well-drained but never soggy) soil to maximize better growth and longevity. Classified as a “wildflower,” it is advisable to cultivate it in a wild garden setting along with other native woodland or grassland plants. Rock gardens are also an excellent area if the soil remains damp.

One piece of advice is to provide a long-lasting plant identification label so you will not forget what it is. Also, remember not to cut, mow, pull, or chop the plant out, thinking it is a clump of unwanted grass.

Stokesia – Stokes Aster

Stokesia laevis



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

For someone who loves to discover new plants to grow in a garden, it was surprising that I had never encountered this plant before—especially in nurseries and garden centers. Search for and grow the **Peachie's Pick** variety if you haven't discovered it. 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 smaller plants (two feet tall) with much more prominent, upright-facing, deeper blue flowers. The plant's icing on the cake is the most valuable trait: The flowers are sterile. Wild-grown plants self-seed with abandon, but Peachie's plant does not. This is ideal because it saves valuable energy, produces longer blooms, and offers extra hardiness.

Another variety is **Honeysong Purple**, which has deeper blue-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 to grow several in your garden.

Syringa – Lilac

Syringa vulgaris and other species



A fragrance garden is only complete with these outstanding, colorful, fragrant shrubs. Lilacs, for me, are not just flowers but a gateway to cherished childhood memories. As a young boy, I recall visiting my Uncle Floyd and Aunt Agnes' farm on warm spring days. They had several large purple lilacs near a swing. The scent of lilac perfume always transports me back to those carefree swinging days of the early 1960s.

A world of colorful varieties awaits you at garden centers and local botanical gardens. Why not start your lilac journey with the familiar old-fashioned species called *Syringa vulgaris* and then venture into the

realm of hybrids and other species? Plant them, and you'll give your children and grandchildren the gift of pleasant gardening memories.

As for any blue-flowered types, that is questionable. People's perceptions vary, but a common idea is that lilacs have more purple variations. Sometimes, depending on where they grow, the purple shade will soften to a bluish cast as the blossoms age or fade by the sun.

Garden centers offer a wide selection of old-timer varieties. One type is "**President Grevy**," or the more extended version, "**President Grevy Blue French Lilac**." This variety has long panicles of light or powder blue florets emerging from purple buds from mid-spring for almost a month. Like most other older varieties, it can eventually grow tall (up to 12 feet) and wide (to eight feet.) It is perfect as a single specimen or in groups in any planting location. Like most French Lilacs, it is super hardy from zones 3 to 9, growing in full sun to partial shade and well-drained, fertile soil.

New blue-flowered varieties are available, including '**Wedgewood Blue**,' which has deeper sky-blue blossoms (again, emerging from violet-purple buds). Still, the size of this bushy shrub is much less—up to six feet tall and slightly less wide when mature. Growers report this lilac is perfect for smaller residential lots. It also blooms mid-spring like most other lilacs and is hardy from zones 3 to 9.

Torenia – Wishbone Flower

Torenia fournieri



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

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

“somewhat” like a turkey wishbone. It’s incredible what our imaginations can conceive of various shapes.

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

Grow the **Summer Wave Bouquet Series** for its bold and beautiful colors. It grows well in any garden area—sun, shade, beds, or containers. The colors range from blue-purple to pure yellow with white markings.

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

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

Although Torenia prefers cool growing conditions (typical of the Snapdragon family), this series grows well in hot and humid locations.

Tradescantia – Spiderwort

Tradescantia virginiana and *Tradescantia ohiensis*



I must give breeders of new flowers two thumbs up for developing beautiful hybrid varieties of this eastern North American perennial. Hardy from zones 4 to 9, the wild plants have long, blade-like dark green leaves with small (around one inch) three-petaled blue flowers with bright yellow stamens. If you have never encountered these flowers, you may think they were small Iris—but they are not.

These flowers bloom in clusters called umbels. A few clusters bloom each day, and each one lasts one day—like daylily blossoms. Over time,

a three-foot-tall group of plants can display hundreds of these small blossoms from mid-spring to midsummer.

One surprising feature of these flowers is when they fade. The petals lose their color and become translucent, allowing light to pass through them. This feature created another nickname, “Widow’s Tears,” for weeping over the death of the flower. The plants can grow in full sun, but the intense light and hot temperatures will make the flowers fade quickly, causing the widows to sob themselves silly. No, these plants prefer part to full shade and can tolerate extended periods of dry soil. While visiting a botanical garden, I saw a bed of these plants thriving and blooming in dense shade in drought-cracked earth.

The wild plants are not exciting, but the new hybrid varieties are gorgeous. If you need a prime example of what breeders have achieved in creating a colorful variety, please grow **Sweet Kate** (shown above). This fascinating and pleasantly gaudy variety has cobalt blue flowers nestled among bright yellow leaves. It is a stunning beauty for any shade garden!

Garden centers should (and I demand they should) have this variety and others available for you to grow in your garden. These newer hybrids will adapt to more sunlight with constant moist soil. If breeders could make these plants keep their beautiful flowers longer than a day, they would be ideal. We may expect too much from certain plants and should enjoy them as they are.

We need to tie up one loose end. What does Spiderwort mean? One theory is it gets its name from the sticky sap that oozes from a stem when broken or cut. When this sap air-dries, it transforms into a whitish, thread-like substance. People thought spiders drank this sap to make their silk for spinning webs.

Theory number two is that this sap helped heal spider bites. Did you get bit by a large vicious spider? Cut a stem and apply the juice to the wound to neutralize the venom and treat the skin. Since the root word is “wort,” a plant used for medical use, I will vote for this theory.

Tweedia or Oxypetalum – Blue Flowered Milkweed

Tweedia caerulea or *Oxypetalum caeruleum*



Starlight, star bright, these blue stars are a beautiful sight! Forgive my “off-key” poetry, but this unusual plant is a sight to behold.

Tweedia is now the accepted Latin name for this unusual vine. Many nurseries still use the old name of Oxypetalum. Who knows? By next Thursday, botanists will change the official Latin name back to Oxypetalum. Next month, the title will switch back to Tweedia. Oh well, a rose by any other name, etc. Speaking of which, this vine has another name, “Southern Star.”

This plant appears to be native to Uruguay and Brazil. Its discovery belongs to Mr. James Tweedie, the head gardener at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh, Scotland. During the mid-1800s, he traveled to South America, collecting plants and seeds and shipping them home. Do they do these exploratory jobs today? If a position has a good healthcare plan and other perks, I won't hesitate to apply for the position. My only requirement would be to travel home each night to sleep in my bed.

This vine is related to—hold on to something to prevent fainting—our common milkweed plants. Milkweed? Yes, a climbing milkweed. It also has the usual white latex sap, but its major attraction is the eye-catching turquoise blue, star-shaped flowers. Those blossoms are so pretty but later turn, as they age, to a somewhat murky gray color (described as mauve.) This color compliments the unusual greenish-gray, furry, or felted stems and leaves.

But wait! There's even more unusualness! Although I refer to this plant as a vine, it has trouble becoming one. What does that mean? The stems have the potential to twine their way upward but seem to struggle when almost two feet tall. I know, this sounds like one wimpy vine.

Tweedia is also not the easiest plant to grow. Root hardy to zone 8 can only survive outdoors when it has established an extensive root system. It prefers to grow in a sunny location with moderately dry soil. Constant damp and cold soil will kill this plant! You can also overwinter the vine indoors in a container, but don't over-water; treat it almost like a cactus.

Some larger garden centers or nurseries may offer plants and seeds. Viewing those intriguing blue blossoms is worth the trouble growing this unusual "vine."

Vinca – Common Periwinkle

Vinca minor



A shade garden is complete with a maintenance-free, evergreen ground cover and hardy perennials. That quickly sums up why to grow it in those tricky, shady areas. A few extra descriptive facts may be suitable.

These low-growing vines (three to six inches tall) can quickly cover the ground, whether grown in partial sunlight or deep shade. They need reliably moist soil but can tolerate dry soil in partial to deep shade. Like most plants, make sure the ground is well-drained.

The plants can become invasive, especially in fertile soil, but not uncontrollably. Regular clipping back will keep this zone 4 to 8

perennial looking neat and tidy. Another similar species, *Vinca major*, has larger leaves and flowers but is less hardy from zones 7 to 9.

A beautiful display of “periwinkle blue” tubular blossoms will carpet the ground each spring. New varieties have pink or white blossoms, but you can’t top that stunning shade of blue. For a flashy display for shady areas, look for the variegated-leaf variety called “**Variegata**.”

Where I previously lived, *Vinca* grew extensively inside a part of the woodland near the house. Its leaves were evergreen throughout a cold winter, and it looked outstandingly beautiful with fresh growth and blue flowers in the spring. I never had to manage it—a welcomed benefit of any plant.

My brother later dug up several sections and transplanted them to a sloped area near his swimming pool. They grew and bloomed okay—not great—but being in full sun and humidity from the pool, they did not look as lovely as the woodland plants.

Not all garden centers sell these plants, but some specialty nurseries should stock them. Growers usually offer them as “plugs” or in plastic pots. You may have to search for them in your area.

Viola – Pansy

Viola cornuta; wittrockiana



Some truly captivating blue-flowered individuals exist within the vast array of species and varieties of violets, violas, and pansies. Imagine entering a garden center nursery in the spring and being greeted by a breathtaking display of rainbow colors. The challenge then becomes narrowing your search for those elusive blue-flowered types.

Let's begin with those plants listed as Violas. A recommended variety to grow is **Rebecca** (shown above). According to several nurseries and garden writers, this is the best bicolor blue variety with a fragrance "*positively intoxicating*," as one writer heralded in a gardening article. Or was it an intoxicated writer named Harold? I'm not sure, but other writers agree it is one of the most potent scented *Viola cornuta*

varieties available. Plus, it's so darn pretty, with stripes and splotches of vibrant blue against a white background. Or are they white stripes against a blue background? No matter, the blossoms are different but gorgeous.

This variety is hardy from zones 5 to 9 and blooms from spring to early summer and possibly again in the fall. Grow these plants in partly shaded borders and containers with fertile, moist, but not sopping wet soil. Cuttings can only propagate Rebecca and other named varieties. Even if they produce seeds, the next generation will not be like them. Larger garden centers may offer potted plants; if not, try online specialty nurseries.

Moving on to another display table of blooming plants, look out for some stunning varieties of seed-grown Pansies. You can instantly recognize them for their large, colorful petals with dark mirror-image "blotches," which many people refer to as "faces."



For a “WOW!” moment, search for the pansy variety called **Celestial Blue** (shown above.) It is pure sky blue with thin, dark “cat whiskers” and a small yellow/orange central eye. It is heavenly.

But wait—there are more varieties available. The Matrix Series has a “**Matrix True Blue**” type with a deeper sky-blue color. Look a little further, and you may come across another series called Clear Crystals, having solid but bright colors, including various shades of blue—from sky to dark blue. One example is called ‘**Clear Crystal Space Blue.**’

Have time to read of another stunning variety? Of course, you do and will not be disappointed. Look for the hybrid pansy series called Cool Wave®. Within its vast spectrum of colors is the stunning **Cool Wave Blue F1** variety. This one deepens the blue to a fantastic sapphire blue with violet-purple markings and that typical small yellow central eye.

OK. I’ve got to stop. Now, it’s up to you to discover other varieties. Most, if not all, nurseries and garden centers have these varieties available. If you are adept at raising plants from seed, many seed companies should have them available. Pansy plants require several weeks to mature and bloom, and it is preferable to sow them in the fall, allow them to develop some growth, overwinter, and bloom in the spring.

Most violas are a biennial or annual and, in some, a short-lived perennial. It depends on your growing zone, with most varieties reliably tolerant to zones 5 to 9.

As with most, if not all, violas, pansies prefer to grow and bloom prolifically in cool weather, partly sunny skies, and well-drained, fertile soil. All are outstanding for bedding, container, and border planting. Unfortunately, they begin to suffer by summer, especially during those hot and humid days.

Vitex – Chaste Tree

Vitex agnus-castus



Believe it or not, this shrub is a woody Verbena family member, including those colorful summer annuals. Western culture may not support this fact, but I find it interesting how different flowers are related to each other.

This shrub has a growth habit like the Buddleias (Butterfly Bushes). Its 12—to 18-inch flower spikes are filled with several tiny, moderately blue to almost purple flowers, all releasing a lovely perfume. The flowers bloom mid-to-late summer and last until a hard frost.

Like Buddleias, cut back the woody stems to nearly a foot off the ground in the winter so it produces fresh growth in the spring. This recent

growth forms the abundant flower spikes in the summer.

This shrub is hardy from zones 6 to 10 and best grown in full sunlight and well-drained, fertile soil. It grows over eight feet tall and almost as wide. It may prove challenging to find, but check the major garden centers in your area. Otherwise, online specialty nurseries should have it available.

Let's move on to the intriguing question, "*What does the common name mean?*" Gather around everyone. It's time for a brief history lesson. Another name for this shrub is "Monks Pepper Tree." Centuries ago, monastery Monks used to grind the seeds to make a pepper substitute for their food. "*Yeah, so what?*" you may be thinking. Well, they had an idea this pepper could also inhibit sexual desire, and thus, the 'chastity' part of the name arose. They must have heavily seasoned their food with it.

Okay. Maybe I've added too much information and conjecture. Perhaps we should not venture too far into this sensitive area of sensual cuisine. Although this information is nothing to post on *Facebook*, inquiring minds need to know all the juicy details. Botanical history can be very entertaining under certain circumstances.

Wisteria

**Wisteria sinensis, floribunda, frutescens,
macrostachys**



People always stare at Wisteria when they first see it. I am no exception. I first admired this vine when visiting my aunt's best friend several years (now eons) ago. She had a large Wisteria growing by her old Tudor-style house. The vine turned into a tree and grew as tall as the house, in full bloom with fragrant blossoms.

Many gardeners commonly have two species available: *Wisteria sinensis*, or Chinese Wisteria, and *Wisteria floribunda*, or Japanese Wisteria. Chinese Wisteria is hardier but less fragrant than the Japanese vine.

Another beautiful but seldom mentioned species is *Wisteria frutescens*, or the American Wisteria, which is also tall and grows with lightly fragrant blossoms. One pretty variety is **Amethyst Falls**, which has lavender-blue flowers.

Another species more gardeners should know about is *Wisteria macrostachys* or the Kentucky Wisteria. Look for the hardy and super fragrant variety called '**Blue Moon**.' This one has beautiful blue-purple blossom clusters, a pleasant sweet fragrance, and re-blooms during the summer. Most Wisteria blooms only in the early summer. Blue Moon, bred in Minnesota, is bone-hardy to zone 3.

Wisteria needs full sunlight to "a little" shade, well-drained soil, and sturdy, long-lasting, tall structures to grow well. Also, try to find potted, established plants (like the named varieties listed above) to transplant. Avoid seed-grown nameless plants at all costs. Seed-grown plants take an eternity to bloom, causing unsuspecting new gardeners to be dissatisfied with seeing no flowers. Blue Moon is a unique cutting-grown variety blooming early for you. You can find it in some larger garden centers.

Now for a word of warning about growing these vines in your garden. They grow tall – VERY TALL! I mentioned my aunt's friend and her "tree" beside her house. It sure looked beautiful, but allowing this vine to grow this tall is a recipe for disaster. The vines can damage house siding, rain gutters, shingles, and roofs — no matter what material covers the house. Always plant these vines far from the house and other structures like power lines or telephone poles.

Conclusion

When I arrive at any of the conclusion sections of my ebooks, I fear that I have neglected, forgotten, or overlooked a plant that, in hindsight, should have been included. This ebook is no exception. My apologies if I overlooked something blatantly obvious.

You may be surprised to see several species and varieties of garden plants displaying their flower petals in blue. After all, if you visit a garden center or view a seed or plant catalog, blue flowers are a minority against seas of yellow, orange, white, or red blossoms. Coming across a bright blue annual or perennial is a pleasant surprise. Let's face it: We can't resist the tendency to purchase their seeds or plants to include in the garden or in a container. It's encoded in our gardening "green thumb" genes (if they should exist!)

There is a world of blue-flowered plants waiting to grace your garden. Although some may be less well-known and thus not grown as frequently, consider their unique beauty. If you stumble upon or are aware of other blue-flowered marvels, seize the opportunity to grow them, for they will add incredible, unique beauty to your garden, regardless of the size or shape of the blossoms. Each one is a naturally occurring rarity displaying the rarest naturally occurring color.

You may also be surprised that you will not see a blue rose, carnation, orchid, snapdragon, or other popularly grown garden or florist flowers. Nope, none are available or will probably never be by Mother Nature's plans. Except...human interference with genetic tinkering may someday "create" blue selections of those listed plants.

Plant geneticists hired by gene splicing and dicing techno-wizardry corporations (think of that fictitious bioengineering one called the *InGen Corporation* in those *Jurassic Park* movies) are hard at work trying to extract blue or purple-making genes from delphiniums or petunias and pasting them into the natural genetic structures of roses or carnations. The idea is to create boatloads of man-made blue flowers to be sold as anything that flowers are sold for today.

Have they succeeded? As of this ebook publishing date, there are none, but they are getting close to it. One rose variety was released to the public in 2005 and heralded as the “first blue rose.” Well, not quite. It turned out to be a dud, for the actual color was that ghastly color called mauve or “blueish”-gray. Marketing gurus may have pulled a sleight-of-hand trick using *Photoshop* to manipulate the rose publicity photos into being a bright blue. Shame on them.

So, the genie to turn flower genes into the color of blue jeans is still elusive, but millions of green dollars are still being spent to achieve this goal. Should we fear unnatural blue flowers gracing our gardens and florist shops? The debate continues if such genetically altered plants can cross-pollinate their non-inherited genes into the wild. The entire biosphere of plant life could be drastically affected.

For now, for many unsuspecting new gardeners, what makes matters worse is unscrupulous people selling seeds (and plants) of outrageously colorful flower varieties over the internet. I have seen sky blue to cobalt blue roses and kaleidoscope-colored double-petal rose varieties with every color of the rainbow (yes, including blue) offered as seeds, no less. Good luck germinating them and waiting with bated breath for those vivid blooms.

I’m not too fond of those pale blue (and green) large carnations sold in florist shops. Many people wish to grow them but fail to realize that the flowers absorb concentrated dye to obtain a pale version of those colors.

Be very cautious of flowers sold in unnatural colors, especially from online sources. As an old saying states, let the buyer beware!

Thank You for reading this ebook

I hope this publication has not only opened your eyes to the multitude of blue-flowered plants available to grow from seeds or plants but also sparked a sense of curiosity about the many more species and types that exist yet often go unnoticed or ignored.

Please visit my author website, <https://gedwinvarner.com> for information about my other gardening ebooks and contact information.

About the Author

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

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

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

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