

Our Forgotten Garden Flowers



G. Edwin Varner

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OUR FORGOTTEN GARDEN FLOWERS

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Written by G. Edwin Varner.

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Preface

This PDF publication is about growing unique, memorable flowering plants that were once popular many years ago but eventually fell out of favor or became overshadowed by newer varieties.

The following is a list of neglected plants you can include in your garden beds and borders. They are not totally lost but could become popular again because of special qualities such as color, simplicity, charm, and even fragrance. Many are still available through specialty nurseries and seed catalogs.

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

Some of this publication's content comes from my previous work on different floral subjects. I revised the wording and corrected some now-noticeable errors while researching the following plants.

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

Introduction

“Sooner or later, everything old is new again.”

— Stephen King, *“The Colorado Kid”*

That quote, in part, has been written or said several times over the years. Jonathan Swift, Mark Twain, Sir Winston Churchill, Mr. King, plus others are notable examples. It is a profound statement that can apply to everything—from fashion and music to politics and religious and philosophical concepts of regeneration and resurrection. Even in a cosmological sense, the elements of exploding old stars (nova) eventually become, after millions or billions of years, new stars, planets, trees, and... us. We are made of star-dust.

Whoa! I’m getting way out of my league here. Let’s get back on track with flowering plants that were grown and enjoyed for many years, including generations of gardeners, but are now rarely grown. We need to explore these plants and try to generate interest in regrowing and enjoying them again today.

Why did these flowers lose gardeners’ interest over time? New varieties eventually become popular and displace the older types in a garden. These newer varieties usually have improved color, hardiness, and disease resistance. But they themselves will eventually lose prominence in our gardens and be replaced by even newer types and/or brand-new flowering plants.

People change as well. Back in great-grandmother’s day, most flowering plants were grown from seed or obtained as cuttings from friends and family members. There were no big garden centers back then, so gardeners had to develop the talent of becoming “green thumbs”. Seed catalogs were the primary source for many species and a limited variety of flower and vegetable seeds.

Older garden plants are then replaced and, eventually, usually forgotten. But some gardeners help retain them and later reoffer them as “antique” plants. And this is where this ebook begins.

The following species and varieties are classic flowers (like classic cars), offering unique qualities that were once popular but are now largely ignored. Take a look, and you may want to reintroduce them into your gardens.

Abutilon — Flowering Maple

Abutilon hybridum



These plants were popular in the late 1800s, but changing aesthetic tastes pushed them out of favor. Today, they can be challenging to find in many nurseries. But fear not, for new generations of gardeners are seeing them in a new light, thanks, in part, to longer-blooming, colorful hybrids. Why not try them?

Although their common name says “Maple,” these tropical and semi-tropical woody shrubs are in a totally different classification than a Maple tree. The leaves look similar to a Maple, but they are not related. These plants grow in the tropical areas of Central and South America, Africa, Australia, and Asia.

The standard type found in many larger garden centers is a hybrid of two or more species.

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

Known as Chinese Bellflowers or Chinese Lanterns, they can grow to over three feet tall and wide when grown outdoors in fertile, well-drained soil, and prefer as much sunshine as possible. In containers, they will be smaller. Cascading varieties can grow in large hanging baskets.

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

You can grow these woody plants from seed, but only in mixed colors. They grow slowly and are unlikely to bloom before Autumn. Propagate named varieties by cuttings to preserve their unique colors.

Alcea — Hollyhock

Alcea rosea



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As a principal representative of the immense Mallow family, Hollyhocks have grown in flower gardens for centuries, but are becoming a rarity now. Why? Two possibilities exist: it is a biennial, so you have to wait until next year to see it bloom—or it grows very tall. This alone scares away many new gardeners. These plants can grow over 8 feet in their second year, overwhelming smaller gardens. Well, that's the usual excuse, but most gardens can accommodate these enjoyable giants.

Hollyhocks also provided an essential element of outdoor beautification in rural years past—especially for hiding outhouses or privy buildings. By 1940, according to a US Census report, only half of the American households had piped-in water for bathing and indoor-installed toilets.

For practically all rural areas, you excused yourself to visit the outhouse. This modest, single-roomed, wooden structure, containing one or two seats (his and hers) and the extensive Sears and Roebuck catalog for reading (and a rear-end-cleaning function for the uninteresting pages), created some anxiety and embarrassment for more genteel homeowners, especially the ladies. Homeowners planted hollyhocks (and other tall-growing flowers, such as morning glories) to hide the outhouse.

According to written accounts, refined ladies, especially those visiting, would politely ask for directions “*to see the hollyhocks.*” This was a code phrase for “*Where is your privy, dear?*” The lady of the house would understand and show her where they grew. For visitors too embarrassed to ask about the hollyhocks, all they had to do was look around the backyard to see them. Their general vicinity could also be located because of the smell — if you know what I mean. But the embarrassment remained, for everyone knew what someone really wanted to do, and it wasn’t to see tall-growing flowers. It was a delicate social situation back then.

Planting these flowers near an outhouse had inherent problems. A major concern was flies, bees, wasps, and spiders. Bees visited the flowers, while wasps and spiders preferred the outhouse’s interior for shelter. Another problem was visiting the outhouse during the winter. Never mind the sub-zero windchill upon your exposed bottom, for you couldn’t say you needed “to admire your hollyhocks” when they were all dead. I suppose people had to “hold it” until they arrived home to occupy their own icy outhouse.

You may not realize it, but we would still need permission to see the hollyhocks without modern indoor plumbing and a bathroom or restroom. God bless all plumbers!

Anyway, back to present-day facts: the blossoms may last one day (as usual for the Mallow family). Still, newer flowers form daily from early to late summer. Their colors range from dark rose, wine-purple, light yellow, pale

pink, red, and pure white. Varieties with fully double petals are famous for their outstanding beauty. For vertical impact, include Hollyhocks.

They are easy to raise from seed and command attention when you show them off to your friends and neighbors. Plant them in a sunny, fertile, well-drained location.

All Hollyhocks are hardy from zone 4 to 9. Many varieties of seeds are available at garden centers and online nurseries.

Amaranthus — Love-Lies-Bleeding; Tassel Flower

Amaranthus caudatus



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If the noir-like common name of this plant does not make you stop with curiosity, the appearance of the droopy, dangly, ropey flower tassels or slender clusters will. Even the rainbow colors of the leaves on one variety add to the wonder. Whatever your opinion is of this plant, it is sure to be the talk of the neighborhood. Most of those reviews may be “undecided”, but based on historical accounts, it was a welcomed garden member for generations of gardeners.

Today, however, it is not grown that much, which is a shame. It is adaptable for many uses, such as cut flowers, cottage gardens, regular beds and borders, and, finally, larger containers.

Amaranthus (popularly known simply as Amaranth) is a shrub-like annual that grows up to six feet tall and spreads nearly three feet wide. This size may be one major reason gardeners today shy away from planting it. But its height is necessary to develop those long, dangly flower inflorescences that some people say resemble cascading African-heritage dreadlocks that can reach the ground. They come in different colors, ranging from pale green, yellow, and orange to the super-popular bright red or dark crimson.

England's Victorian gardeners were preoccupied with giving every flower emotional meaning. Here, this plant represented friendship and unconditional love. If you're confused about how a 'Love-Lies-Bleeding' nickname with dark, film-noir overtones translates into a lovey-dovey meaning, join the club of us clueless gardeners.

To get the maximum growth and bloom potential from this plant, make sure to start the seeds indoors up to five weeks before the last expected spring frost date. This plant begins blooming in mid-summer and continues until a killing autumn frost. Plant your transplants in a sunny location in your typical well-drained, fertile soil. Once established, stand back, for it grows rapidly, especially in hot weather.

There are some notable varieties to look for in seed catalogs, or if you're fortunate, starter plants in garden centers. A famous, long-grown variety is '**Joseph's Coat**,' which has gorgeous multi-colored leaves. I am not sure what the flowers look like, for I have only seen the extravagant leaf colorations. Let's grow it and find out what the flowers look like.

Other varieties include '**Green Thumb**' (or '**Viridis**') having pale green dangly flowers; '**Golden Giant**' has golden-yellow florets, and '**Coral Fountain**' has cascading salmon to pink blossoms. By far the most popular are those bright to dark red varieties, too numerous to list. You will find them in many seed catalogs.

Amberboa — Sweet Sultan

Amberboa moschata (formerly *Centaurea moschata*)



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A member of the vast Asteraceae family, which famously includes, to name a few examples, daisies, sunflowers, and chrysanthemums, this annual plant is more closely related to the thorny thistles. For ages, it was classified as *Centaurea moschata*, until some eager-beaver botanical taxonomists (Latin name-givers) decided to reevaluate it as *Amberboa moschata*. If this announcement made national news, I must have missed it.

Anyway, its common name is more interesting because it describes the flower buds as resembling the turban headwear of the Ottoman Sultans who ruled during the Ottoman Empire. Coincidentally, this is the region where these plants are originally found, from the Caucasus region extending into Iran, Iraq, Armenia, and Turkey. The “sweet” part of the nickname refers to the flower’s sweet fragrance.

Over the centuries and generations, it spread across Europe and later into North America. It became a “scent-station” for pre-and early US gardeners throughout the 1700s and 1800s. Today, well...this plant isn’t much in demand. But it should be reintroduced to enjoy its large (three-inch diameter), fluffy, fully double blossoms.

Their colors range from impressive yellow, off-white, pink, rose, purple, to pale lilac in a variety called ‘**Imperialis Mix.**’ One outstanding variety, **The Bride**, has immense, fluffy, pure snow-white blooms and has been popular with many gardeners.

Sweet Sultan prefers full sun and slightly alkaline, well-draining soil. Young plants also prefer regular watering, but once established and blooming, they can tolerate drier conditions. Not only do the productive blossoms attract many pollinators, but they also make long-lasting indoor cut-flower displays.

Antirrhinum — Snapdragon

Antirrhinum majus



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Times have changed since I was a boy. Yes, the frequent changes in politics, technology, environmental degradation, climate change, social issues, and other matters immediately come to mind—but so do flowers. Of all the plants I can measure as having undergone so many changes, this garden annual exhibits the most.

When I was a boy, “snaps” were tall, stately plants, grown extensively in practically all flower gardens. I still remember my mother sowing the seeds

and transplanting the young plants into the garden. When they bloomed, she would cut the tall stems to decorate the house.

The flowers provide easy interactive fun for children (and us childish adults). The “jaws” of the tubular petals will snap shut when you open them with your fingers. I remember how enthralled I was by seeing bumblebees struggle to open the dragon’s jaws to climb into the floral throat, only to disappear and then reappear as they emerge. That was innocent fun for an innocent age.

Old-fashioned varieties grown years ago in cottage gardens actually had a sweet fragrance. Few types grown today have that wonderful trait. One variety, **Lipstick Silver**, has red and white petals with a light, sweet, clove perfume. Another fragrant one is **Royal Bride** with pure white flowers. Both types grow to almost three to four feet tall.

Speaking of height, I dislike many current varieties because breeders have made snaps more “open-mouthed.” They also place a greater emphasis on dwarf varieties. Instead of tall, imposing dragons, they are now small lizards. At some point in gardening history, people want flowering plants to be short. I always joked with friends that if a plant grew taller than their knees, there was a possibility of getting a nosebleed from the high altitude. Think about it.

A few varieties raised today have an imposing dragon-sized stature, growing to three feet or taller. These are the types that make excellent cut flowers. They need plenty of sunlight, fertile soil, and possibly stakes to keep them standing tall and proud. You don’t want a droopy dragon.

Many fire-breathing-sized varieties are available as seeds from online nurseries. Your local garden center will rarely have these, since they usually sell the common gecko-sized types.

If you can find seeds — and better yet, transplantable-sized plants — you need to grow the F1 Hybrids of the **Rocket**, **Potomac**, or the **Liberty Series**. These hybrid types have a full complement of colors, tall stems laden with blossoms, and bloom non-stop (with regular cutting) from midsummer to fall.

Browallia

Browallia speciosa or Browallia americana



Johan Browallius (1707-1755), a Swedish botanist, bishop, and physician, first discovered this gorgeous plant growing in South America. I guess he couldn't decide which occupation to pursue, but he had a keen eye for discovering beautiful flowers. It has the familiar names Sapphire Flower, Bush Violet, or Amethyst Flower because its star-shaped petals are vivid blue, purple, or white.

Classified as a tropical plant, most gardeners grew Browallia as an annual. It was popular decades ago but eventually fell out of interest. It belongs to the same family as flowering tobacco and petunias. Easy to grow from seeds sown in the early spring, they will grow and bloom by midsummer.

Sensitive to frost, raise these plants as annuals in beds or containers. You can also grow them indoors for winter in a warm, well-lit area.

Browallia grows well in well-drained, fertile soil in full sun to partial shade. In garden beds, they can grow up to two feet tall and wide and produce blossoms all summer long. When grown in containers, clip them back to control their height. As with most other outdoor plants, whiteflies, aphids, and other pests love them as much as we do.

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

Campanula — Canterbury Bells

Campanula medium



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These famous petal-forged bells will colorfully toll in late spring and continue through midsummer, with gorgeous displays of blue, purple, pink, or heavenly white.

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

This species has long been recognized as a necessary addition to “cottage gardens,” but, surprisingly, less so now. It blooms abundantly on two- to three-foot-tall stems. These plants prefer well-drained, moist, humus-rich soil in partially sunny locations. The most essential winter requirement is well-drained ground to prevent root and crown rot.

Like most other biennials, the plants can self-sow aplenty, but when first growing them in your garden, make sure to sow seeds two years in a row to establish repeat yearly blooming.

By including these flowers, channel your inner Chaucer into authoring a colorful tale about your garden. Adding “off-color” derogatory descriptive details is your prerogative.

Canna — Indian Shot

Canna indica



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If you desire to add a tropical feel to your flower gardens, you can't go wrong with including these colorful plants. Their striking flowers and large leaves offer plenty of visual enjoyment.

Many varieties flaunt variegated leaves that look like stained-glass windows backlit by the sun. Some gardeners will shyly confess that they enjoy these leaves more than the flowers. Brilliant yellow, pink, red, and orange shades intermix with white stripes and splotches, highlighting wide varieties. Strangely, botanists (and growers) discovered that no pure white species or variety exists.

Cannas are native to tropical and subtropical regions of Central and South America — prime hummingbird locations. Over time, different species became “transplanted” into temperate and other tropical areas of the world. These plants became popular for their ease of culture and adaptability, allowing them to form hybrids and grow in any garden.

Grown from thick rhizomes, their ultimate height — based on how tall the flower stalk grows — can extend up to eight feet or more, depending on the variety. Each year, new types are all created with many varieties growing to “acceptably comfortable” heights — for us — but hummingbirds prefer taller types.

All Cannas prefer to grow in full to partial sunlight and continuously moist, highly fertile soil either in the garden or in containers. These plants thrive in humid conditions but need regular watering during drought.

Cold-region gardeners (below zone 8) can grow these plants successfully by planting the rhizomes in larger containers and setting them outside after the last frost. By fall, bring these pots indoors for the winter. By withholding water during this time, you simulate the rhizomes’ natural dormancy.

The critical question is, which old-time Canna can you plant? One forgotten variety with single-petaled red blossoms is the species type called **Indian Shot** (*Canna indica*) or **India Prince**. This one has garnet or single blood-red petals above dark green or greenish-black stems and foliage.

This and other single-petal varieties (no matter the color) are best found by searching online Canna specialty nurseries.

Cardiospermum — Love-in-a-Puff

Cardiospermum halicacabum



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The other name, though less cute, is Balloon Vine, and it grows in many tropical and subtropical regions. Recorded as being discovered or first grown in the early 19th century, there is some confusion about its original home — possibly from Mexico to Central and South America — but it is also found in equatorial Africa and parts of India.

The tiny white blossoms are insignificant, but their seed “capsules” are the main attraction. They are puffy, air-inflated, paper-like coverings similar to the fruit of Tomatillos. These inflated, green, changing to brown (when ripe)

balloons dangle from the extensive vines. What does this love business have to do with this vine? Look at the seeds!



They are small, round, and black, but have the unmistakable shape or imprint of a white heart. This shape corresponds to where each of the three seeds was attached to the vine. The genus botanical name, '*Cardiospermum*,' translates (from Latin) as 'cardio,' meaning heart, and '*spermum*,' meaning seed or seed-related.

No wonder this vine became famous for the affairs of the heart. During and after Queen Victoria's reign, people used a popular method of subtle communication from the Middle East: "*The Language of Flowers*." Many flowers have different behavioral meanings associated with emotions, ideas, and attitudes. These secretive, hidden meanings became associated with flowers. Love-in-a-Puff represented "hidden love" — yes, from the concealed heart-shaped seeds inside the balloon. Gee, I wonder what the Skunk Cabbage flowers represent? Okay, best we do not know.

Hardy from zones 9 to 11, the plant loves sunny, fertile areas and weaves its thin vines through other shrubs, trellises, and additional support. As usual, all this weaving and climbing can become invasive. The vines can become too weedy, smothering other plants and weighing them down until they collapse. This has happened in many subtropical areas where the vine has escaped its natural growing range. Talk about an 'achy-breaky' heart!

Gardeners can take heart, for this vine is raised as an annual and does not spread with such wild abandon. It may prove challenging to find, but try getting seeds from companies that sell rare seeds.

Cheiranthus — Wallflower

Cheiranthus cheiri



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Better known as Wallflowers, these perennials (related to the Cabbage and Broccoli family) were heavily used in English and European cottage gardens of years past. They are native to southern Europe and were introduced to gardens in Great Britain sometime around 1573, give or take a few months.

Eventually they fell out of popularity—I suppose it was a change in taste for what to grow in cottage gardens. Fortunately, a few old varieties still remain, and even new varieties are slowly being grown. As with all other fragrant flowers, some varieties have differing degrees of perfume.

The varieties listed below tend to have some very beautiful flowers and scents – although a few people may not like the heavy, syrupy sweetness they exude. I say if it has perfume—enjoy it.

All Wallflowers need to be planted in sunlight to shade and in well-drained, limy soil. Space 1' apart. The height of the varieties averages around 18" tall. Hardy in Zones 6 to 8. They can be used as container subjects in all zones.

“BLOODY WARRIOR” is a beloved bushy variety cultivated for years and is now very rare. It blooms in the late spring. The name refers to dried blood, a very dark crimson or mahogany color, which is what the double petals look like. Occasional yellow stripes also mix into this color. It sounds ghastly, but it's actually very beautiful!

These late-spring-blooming flowers come in numerous clusters and have an enjoyable, syrupy sweetness. This old variety hasn't gone extinct yet, but it could be gone if we don't preserve it for the future. Do your part to preserve this rare flower. Try growing this with some of your spring tulips for one spectacular display!

Another old variety close to being extinct is **“HARPUR CREWE”**. This variety was named for an Englishman, Rev. Edward Harpur Crewe, sometime in the late 1800s. This is a sweetly fragrant variety with bright double lemon-yellow flowers.

This is also a spring bloomer and would look and smell great mixed in a bed of red tulips. ‘Harpur’ is like the above variety in all ways, including that it has also become very rare to find and should be grown more. Bless the beasts and the children along with this floral beauty. Some mail-order nurseries still offer this variety, but supply is usually limited because it is more difficult to propagate.

ERYSIMUM WALLFLOWERS

Closely related to and resembling the genus *Cheiranthus* is this separate genus classification of very floriferous and hardy perennials. I decided to include them here rather than list them separately. Even botanists debate over whether to list them separately or lump everything together under

Cheiranthus. For this publication, I will do it for them and complicate matters!

“FRAGRANT SUNSHINE” Erysimum is a brand-new variety that has been offered to garden centers for a few years. It is a very compact grower with bright yellow to deep yellowish-orange blossoms, sometimes speckled with red spots or stripes. The highly enjoyable perfume they emit is very strong and syrupy sweet. The flowers are sterile, meaning they cannot form seeds. Because of this sterility, the plant keeps making new flowers instead of seeds.

It blooms from late April until July. It is hardy in zones 5 to 9. It needs full sun to partial shade and well-drained, limy soil to bloom to its full potential. It grows about 18 to 24 inches tall but becomes very bushy. Recommended plant spacing is 12 inches. It makes a great-looking landscape or container specimen, or works well in rock gardens and perennial borders.

“WENLOCK BEAUTY” is similar to the above variety; it is a “wallflower of many colors.” It has no clue what the final color of its flowers will be. At any one time, the numerous blossoms will be rosy-red, rose-pink, rosy-orange, bronze, maroon red, pink, mauve, light yellow, bright yellow, light purple, and... well, you add some more colors. The one color — dark green — specifically refers to the leaves. What a relief!

One thing all these flower color combinations have in common is that they are all very sweetly scented. Hooray! This variety blooms from mid-spring (April) to late June. It grows to about 18 inches tall, is very bushy, and is hardy in zones 5 to 9. It grows well in poor to regular soils but prefers some lime. This is a wonderful perennial.

Cleome — Spider Flower

Cleome hassleriana



Gardeners often call this plant the Spider Flower, Spider Legs Flower, or Spider Plant because the elongated stamens radiate from the colorful petals. The plants grow upright in spikes rather than in a bushy form. It's common for them to grow to nearly six feet tall by fall. During this time, they bloom for most of the summer.

The flowers can be white, light to dark pink, or lavender-purple. Some varieties are bi-colored, pink and white, or pale lavender-purple and white. Older types typically have a light fragrance, but most people dislike the scent.

Cleome was once a favorite annual for flower gardens, giving well-needed color and height, but times and flower preferences change. Today, several other annuals have provided greater enjoyment. Maybe it is the flowers' appearance, their ever-growing height, prickly stems, unattractive scent, overabundant seed formation, or a combination of these factors that has gradually weakened their acceptance in flower beds or borders. Whatever the faults, one redeeming quality is that this plant looks enjoyable and memorable.

This plant prefers full sun to partial shade and well-drained soil. Sow seeds indoors, but they germinate better if planted outdoors in early spring, where they can bloom. The plants will self-seed, and many seedlings will sprout next spring.

They are beautiful, and children will enjoy watching them grow and bloom—especially when butterflies feed on the flowers' nectar. You can reliably find seeds at many garden centers and in catalogs.

Consolida — Larkspur; Annual Delphinium

Consolida ajacis; Consolida regalis



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Once regarded as a necessity for any cottage garden, Larkspur provides an abundance of spring blooms. These flowers come in blue, purple, pink, rose, white, and several pastel variations. One distinctive feature of these blossoms is that they closely resemble those of delphiniums. Larkspur is often confused with delphinium, even though, surprisingly for many gardeners, they are distinctly different.

- Larkspur is an annual plant while the delphinium is a hardy perennial.
- Although the flowers closely resemble each other, they differ in size. Delphiniums tower over 4 feet above the ground while the Larkspur plants are low-growing (1 to 2 feet) and bushy. If it weren't for this height difference, no one would believe these plants are significantly different.
- The Delphinium blossoms are heavily clustered together on these tall stalks. At the same time, the Larkspur bushes sport extended blossoms along each thin inflorescence.
- One unexpected difference is that larkspur is easier to grow and blooms faster. This is understandable since they are annuals. They require less maintenance (such as staking) and adapt to different soil conditions, except for constantly wet soil.

Larkspur needs plenty of sunlight and, for maximum blooms, fertile soil. Seeds need cool soil conditions to germinate in the spring. The best sowing technique is to scatter seeds in a designated garden area in the fall, and they will germinate in the early spring. Early cold temperatures slow growth but usually don't kill them. This classifies them as hardy annuals.

They grow and bloom best during the cooler spring months but may continue into early summer if they don't experience hot, muggy conditions.

Why are they less grown and appreciated today? I guess the usual claim is that they are "lesser-grade, single-flowered Delphiniums" since they don't show that spectacular, towering bloom. Another excuse, also tied to blooming, is that they mainly bloom in the spring. At the same time, Delphiniums prefer warmer, long-lasting summer blooms. For an inquiring mind — why don't gardeners grow both to enjoy blooms all season?

Dianthus — Sweet William

Dianthus barbatus



Depending on when growers raise these plants from seed, they usually consider them biennials. Still, they can also be annuals or perennials. When grown as biennials, the plants survive the cold and produce abundant flowers for the early summer. If you clip back the spent flowers, you can “possibly” keep them for another year of splendor.

You can always count on these historically favorite plants to add a colorful impact to any garden bed or border. Unlike the large-flowered carnations florists offer, these plants display impressive flower heads made up of several small clusters of single or double white, red, dark garnet, pink, or mixed colors. The petals usually have serrations — like cloth cut by pinking

shears. Not a clothes designer? Well, look it up on Google, and you will understand. This jagged pattern gives these flowers the common nickname of “pinks.”

Some varieties also have a noticeable clove scent — not as strong as carnations, but still evident when inhaling a bouquet.

Most types grow to about 2 feet but branch out to form compact ovals of noticeably green to bronze-ish leaves and stems, topped by these gorgeous flowers.

Dictamnus — Gas Plant

Dictamnus fraxinella albus; roseus



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Emilia — Tassel Flower

Emilia sonchifolia var. *Javanica*



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In movies, television, and theatre, supporting cast members often seem more popular (in person or as the characters they play) than the lead actors. This makes the story more enjoyable and entertaining. Some garden flowers also have this “talent” to make a garden more energetic and vibrant.

Tassel Flowers have historically been a “screen-stealer” for many generations of gardens worldwide. But for me, I just don’t get it. Yes, the small, double-petaled, paintbrush-style head of the brilliant red to deep orange flowers is eye-catching, but the whole plant is excessively weedy.

There is more to stem than flower, but, apparently, that is part of its appeal. The idea is that the three-foot-tall (and higher) stems weave themselves in and amongst other flowers and erupt with those bright blossoms.

One popular variety, famous for ages, is **Irish Poet**. If you think this plant derives from Ireland or actual Irish poets, you are, like many before you, mistaken. The only resemblance to anything Irish is the bright red flower coloration in reference to an Irishman's (a poet, for good measure) wind-blown, tousled, ginger hair. OK. This descriptive varietal name carries a lot of romanticism.

This tropical annual plant actually hails from...well, here's a problem: throughout time, there's been confusion about who gets bragging rights to call this plant home. Some "authorities" say tropical Africa, while others claim the Orient or Asia. Big areas, to say the least!

Anyway, this plant can make your home its home, for it can broadcast its seeds everywhere within your garden and your neighbor's gardens. It is not overly invasive, but please bear in mind it is a distant relation to your common dandelion. This isn't all bad, because those seeds can germinate in mid to late summer and bloom in the fall before a killing frost in many locations.

This plant enjoys plenty of sunlight and well-drained, fertile soil — and supportive neighboring plants — to grow and bloom well.

Garden centers may not offer transplantable plants, but they will offer seed packets. They germinate reasonably well when sown outdoors or indoors a few weeks before the last early spring frost.

Eryngium — Sea Holly

Eryngium giganteum and *Eryngium maritimum*



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Here is something Elsa of Arendelle may grow in Disney World flowerbeds. This hardy semi-perennial to biennial should add decorative bling to yours, too. The common name fits its waxy, spiny, thistle-like leaves, usually silvery-gray. However, some varieties have an attractive blue tint.

Naturalized for sandy coastal locations, you don't have to live near the seaside, for these plants will adapt well in rock gardens or borders supplemented with gravel-enhanced garden soil.

The flower heads and surrounding bracts have a shiny appearance, with some varieties even shinier. They look like large ice crystals or snowflakes. A long-popular variety, **Miss Wilmott's Ghost**, is famous for its silvery-white, crystal-like flower heads. Other types offer metallic blue shades.

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

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

Years ago, wild plants were common near sand dunes. Today, botanists find fewer populations because people steal them for flower gardens. This doesn't have to be, because you can quickly grow attractive varieties from seed or purchased nursery plants.

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

Eschscholzia — California Poppy, Golden Poppy

Eschscholzia californica



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This gorgeous annual is perfect for your flower garden if you are a self-proclaimed semi-lazy gardener (no disrespect, given that many people lead hectic lives). It is one of the best sow-on-the-ground flowers. As a biennial, you must wait until the following spring to enjoy your beds or borders with brilliant golden yellow, orange, red, and eye-catching pink flowers.

Being a sow-and-forget plant, don't count on them germinating "this year." In fact, you'll probably forget about them until next year, when they

germinate and grow, then later bloom. Their seeds tend to be excessively hard and require plenty of moisture (and possibly exposure to cold soil) to germinate. OK. That's the "fine print" observation on raising these outstanding plants.

As a member of the Poppy family, this plant is native to the arid areas of the far western USA — notably California — and, no great surprise, Mexico.

The foliage has finely divided, feathery, blue-green leaves, topped with single to semi-double blossoms. The height of this bushy plant can be, on average, a foot tall, but if it is taller, it will flop over. This is of no concern, for new shoots always produce more flowers. The only "problem" is that the petals close up at night and during cool, cloudy, and rainy days. This may be its greatest fault, and it's why many gardeners fail to grow this plant.

These plants grow best in sunny beds and borders with well-drained soil but prefer less-fertile conditions, unlike most other garden flowers. If you over-fertilize, you can expect more stems and leaves but fewer flowers.

Find a less-than-ideal area near your home and scatter the seeds. They will amaze you with how they increase through excessive flowering and new self-sown seeds the following year.

Several varieties, or strains, of these plants exist. You can easily find the species in garden center seed racks, including a brilliant red form called **Red Chief**. Online nurseries offer a wider selection, including varieties with pastel and ruffled petals.

Godetia — Farewell-to-Spring; Satin Flower

Clarkia amoena and hybrids



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Sometimes, annual wildflowers can become so beloved that they become popular garden subjects. This was true generations ago, but easier-to-grow, longer-blooming flowers have eventually eclipsed many of these wild bloomers. Such is the case for Godetia.

Native to the coastal areas of British Columbia and southward to central coastal California, this plant produces an abundance of naturally occurring pink or lavender cup-shaped blossoms. Newer hybrids extend the spectrum

to pastel shades, including red, coral orange, and white. Some varieties blend these colors. The petals have a satiny sheen, and many people mistake these plants for miniature azaleas.

Blooming heavily from early to late spring (depending on your climate zone), they begin to rapidly decrease by early summer. Their spectacular peak bloom coincides with the end of spring, earning them the familiar nickname “Farewell-to-Spring.” These plants dislike summer heat and begin to die off, especially after producing large amounts of seed.

Related to the Evening Primrose family, *Clarkia* can grow to nearly 2 feet tall and wide when sown in sunny, well-drained, fertile soil. They were popular for cottage garden displays, rock gardens, and meadow settings since they need practically no maintenance. Since they self-seed abundantly, new plantings were reliable for each spring display.

So, what made them less noticeable in today’s gardens? Longer-blooming annuals replaced them, and garden centers no longer offered them as established potted plants. These plants hate being root-disturbed and will suffer to the point of dying if transplanted. Sowing the seeds in a bed or border in early spring or fall suits them well. This sounds easy enough for everyone. Still, many gardeners prefer to set out plants in precise locations instead of helter-skelter broadcasting seed over an area.

It’s well worth a try to establish these colorful annuals again in our gardens.

Gomphrena — Globe Amaranth

Gomphrena globosa



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

The strange part of this apparent lack of interest is that, historically, it has been a welcome inhabitant in flower gardens worldwide for years. Today, no one seems overly excited about its colorful, easy-to-grow merits compared to petunias and impatiens.

Interest in these plants now appears to be reviving, as breeders and growers rearrange genes to make them more eye-appealing to modern gardeners.

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

Globe Amaranth is one of those easy-to-grow annuals that thrive in sunny, hot, and dry locations. It is native to the southwestern United States and Mexico. Once it blooms, nothing stops it until a fall frost.

Although they make excellent cut flowers lasting about a week in a vase, you can also turn them into everlasting flowers (like Lavender) by slowly drying them. They retain their color but are not as bright. Well, no matter, for they will remain beautiful for a long time.

Heliotropium — Heliotrope

Heliotropium peruvianum



This plant was honored as “The Annual of the Year” in 1898. It’s 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 popular in the late 19th century for 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 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, then changes to pure white as it matures.

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

Hesperis — Dame's Rocket or Sweet Rocket

Hesperis matronalis



This plant has many common names, including Dame's Wort, Dame's Gilliflower, Damask Violet, Dame's Violet, Night-scented Gilliflower, Mother-of-the-Evening, and heaven knows how many other "Dame's What-ers."

Contrary to the common name, it has nothing to do with NASA-style rockets. Rocket is an old name for mustard plants or their close relatives. This plant is in the same family as cabbage, broccoli, and cauliflower.

The Latin name *Hesperis* means “of the evening,” and *matronalis* means “motherly.” Somehow, it became associated with Eve (as in the famous Adam and Eve couple), but in a more negative way. Seventeenth-century English herbalist Nicholas Culpeper negatively called this plant “Eve’s Weed.” Shame on you, Nicholas. Poor Eve—all because of snacking on that forbidden fruit.

Native to Europe and Asia, it is a flower garden escapee growing wild in many moist, partly shady roadside ditches and outside woodlands.

Although *Hesperis* makes beautiful, hardy garden plantings, it can produce many seeds (like all members of the Cabbage Family). It is ecologically invasive in several areas of North America and other continents because it grows wild in many moist, partly shady roadside ditches.

One primary reason this plant has spread so far and wide is the harmful practice of seed companies including it in wildflower seed mixes to sow in shady, moist areas for springtime blooms.

It begins life as a biennial, blooming in the second spring and lasting into midsummer. However, it can live as a short-lived perennial and flower again.

Botanists classify *Hesperis* as a vespertine flowering plant that blooms with fragrant purple or white flowers and releases a sweet, lily-like perfume into the evening air. Well, it smells better than cooked broccoli!

Hardy from zones 3 to 9, it thrives in part sun to full shade and moist, loamy soil. It has been a popular wildflower in many flower gardens worldwide for centuries. You can include it in your garden, but clip off the seed stems to prevent excessive reseeding.

I hate to admit this, but this plant does not produce “drop-dead with amazement” garden flowers — except for their sweet scent. If you have a shaded, wooded area that needs sprucing up, buy a few packets of seeds and sprinkle them here and there. You should experience a beautiful sight by the following spring. How easy is it to transform a dull area into something bright and beautiful?

Impatiens — Touch-Me-Not or Busy Lizzie

Impatiens balfourii; *balsamina*,



If you wish to grow an Impatiens that is totally different but was once a popular garden inhabitant, then *Impatiens balfourii* (shown above), called ‘**Poor Man’s Orchid**,’ is needed. It is an old-fashioned species native to regions of the Himalayas and Kashmir. It was once common in gardens but is now almost forgotten, eclipsed over these many years by the common bedding Impatiens. How sad.

Growing this species from seed is easy. They can grow to almost four feet tall and wide. Weekend gardeners will get nosebleeds at this height, but these dimensions add charm and interest. The flowers are a soothing pink-

and-white to lavender-and-white bicolors, resembling small orchids. It blooms all summer in part to full shade.

This plant also grows well in large containers filled with rich, loamy soil. Remember, it self-seeds like crazy with many self-detonating (touch-me-not) seed pods, so you will find new seedlings germinating throughout your garden the following spring.

Seeds are tricky to find, but some online English seed companies sell them. I have never seen these plants offered for sale in garden centers. No great surprise, for they cater to offering billions of our regular, boring, bedding Impatiens.



Another old-fashioned favorite is our common Balsam (*Impatiens balsamina*). This plant grows more upright and bushier than our common Impatiens. The flowers are in various colors and shades. They range from single to gorgeous double flowers, like **Blackberry Trifle**—shown above.

These plants were once popular with gardeners, not only for their attractive, colorful blossoms but also, strangely enough, for their ripening seed pods. You could say these plants offer interactive entertainment not only for children but also for mischievous adults, too.

Many Impatiens plants are commonly called Touch-Me-Not. As the fuzzy pods grow larger and older and the enclosed seeds ripen, the slightest touch with a finger will cause them to surprisingly explode. Well, not really. Seeds will shoot outward, followed by shouts of surprise and laughter. Even the boring garden Impatiens pulls this trick with its seed pods, though nobody sees it happen.

Regular bedding Impatiens are not among the easiest flowers to grow from seed. In fact, they can be frustrating, which is why many gardeners prefer to buy plants. However, Balsam offers a simpler alternative.

Their seeds are larger than standard Impatiens seeds and germinate much more easily. The plants grow upright and can become bushy, with flowers in various colors and shades, with single or double petals. The flowers are attractive, but wait until the developing seed capsules ripen.

Some seed catalogs or garden nurseries offer seeds of this plant, but you may have to hunt for them. They can also grow in large containers filled with fertile, loamy soil. Unlike most Impatiens, Balsam plants can grow well in full to partial sunlight but still need adequate, moist soil for better growth and bloom.

Ipomopsis — Standing Cypress; Texas Plume; Red Gilia

Ipomopsis rubra



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Once you've seen it with its spikes of glowing, bright red, star-shaped, tubular flowers orbited by hummingbirds, you know you have to have this plant growing in your garden. Ahh, if only it were so simple to raise.

This is one plant that, in theory, should be easy to grow but usually proves not to be. It is one of those confusing, frustrating, and irritating plants that impatient gardeners hate to grow just because it is a biennial.

One disturbing fact is that seed companies should properly advise gardeners on how to sow and grow it. As a biennial, *Ipomopsis* seeds require a cold and wet period to germinate in the spring and a full year of vegetative growth. The plants wait until the following summer to bloom.

Another area of confusion is with hardiness zones. Growers sometimes list *Ipomopsis* as an annual or a perennial hardy to zone 5. I wish it were reliably so, but zone 6 is the best cold-climate zone you can hope for. No, this plant prefers warmer climates; it is native to the southwestern US and Mexico. Here, this plant can survive some winter cold and snow but not the northern state's long duration of Siberian-like cold. The overwintering rosette of fern-like leaves stays green but dormant until spring warmth.

Another factor in plant survival is that it grows in very well-drained soil. Like many other desert-loving plants, it will develop a long taproot to obtain water in the dry, hot summer months. This root will only grow if the soil is sandy or gravelly. Regular, mulch-enhanced garden soil can rot the roots, so place this plant in a different, drier location.

OK, if you have grown your plants or bought some from a nursery, and they successfully lived over the winter, long stems — most rising to over five feet tall with several side branches — will arise from the rosette of leaves. A prodigious cluster of vivid red tubular blossoms will bloom throughout the summer. Newer hybrids now have shades of yellow and orange, but the vibrant red selections are the most popular.

Some growers and gardeners say these flowers are “hummingbird magnets,” drawing in the birds from far and wide to quench their thirst for nectar.

By late summer, cut off most of the spent flower spike, leaving a few to dry. Once the seeds are ripe, scatter a few here and there to begin a new generation of plants for the future. A few older plants may survive (as perennials) and re-bloom the following summer.

Linaria — Toadflax

Linaria vulgaris



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Several species and varieties of Toadflax once grew abundantly in flower gardens. Most are native wildflowers of Europe and eventually spread over time and distance to other parts of the world. They are pretty and low-growing, with most blooming for a long time. Think of them as being miniature snapdragons with those characteristic stout, tubular petals.

One species, *Linaria vulgaris*, historically known as “the common toadflax,” also has nicknames such as “**yellow toadflax**” or the more descriptive “**butter-and-eggs toadflax**.” Its species name, “*vulgaris*,” comes from its

weedy spread worldwide, especially in construction waste areas or along roadbanks. Like, these are pristine, gorgeous areas, and this plant can hideously corrupt them!

Anyway, I happened to be walking my dog and cut across the old, derelict part of the city's cemetery when bright yellow and orange colors caught my eye. Curious, I knelt down and realized I had never seen this colorful plant before. I assumed it must be a miniature snapdragon. Nestled against a headstone, it was in perfect health, with abundant blooms. A few yards away, next to another headstone, was another small cluster of these blooming plants.

These were not newly decorated graves — the dear departed left their mortal coil in the early 1900's. I assumed these were perpetually self-sown plants, either deliberately planted long ago, or a seed or two happened to find its way to grow at these graves.

I eventually discovered its name and history, but was perplexed why I never saw it in garden catalogs or nurseries. Apparently, no one grows it anymore, which ultimately spurred me to write this ebook about past-popular or forgotten garden flowers.

All *Linaria* plants appreciate plenty of sunlight and well-drained soil. Fertile soil is a bonus, but they can tolerate less fertile locations.

Lunaria — Honesty, Money Plant

Lunaria annua



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As a gardener, a specific plant must have captivated you enough to later enjoy other exciting flowers. *Lunaria* is my focal point. It wasn't its purplish flowers, but the dried, flattened, oval, transparent seed pods. As a wee-tyke, my older brother and sister convinced (aka "conned") me into believing they were silver coins made by this plant. It eventually dawned on me that they were fooling me. I was always gullible.



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Anyway, these seed pods are what make this plant so unique. But let's not neglect what makes those seed pods so special: large clusters of vibrant four-petal violet-purple or white blossoms that bloom from late spring into mid-summer. They attract pollinators because they are filled with nectar.

This plant is a glamorous relative of cabbage, broccoli, and other cruciferous members. While they produce cylindrical seed pods, *Lunaria* decided to outdo all the other kin and make those round seed pods. Talk about botanical curveballs in radical transformations!

Although an everyday staple in yesteryear's flower beds, these two-foot-tall-plus plants are rarely grown, and seeds are not available at present garden centers or catalogs. Again, it may be because of their biennial lifestyle, for we need quick amazement. It's time to change this attitude.

Seeds can be purchased from specialty rare-seed online shops and sown in early summer in a sunny or lightly shady, well-drained, fertile bed or border. You can later transplant potted plants in late summer.

If you enjoy home decorating with dried floral arrangements, these stem-attached dried seed pods are attention-getters.

Malope — Annual Mallow

Malope trifida ‘Vulcan’



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

While researching this variety, I have seen it referred to as having “*drop-dead gorgeous flowers*,” “*piece-of-cake easy to grow*,” and “*this is a ‘WOW’ flower!*” Even the great garden writer and author Louise Beebe Wilder recommended, in 1935, that gardeners should grow this plant.

Boldly we go into a stellar garden, for *Star Trek*'s Mr. Spock would say it would be illogical not to grow this plant. Gee, what more can be added to extol its outstanding botanical virtues? Well, I'll let you raise it, and then you can include additional euphoric praise. How about "*Live long and prosper?*"

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

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

Like most annual flowers, this plant prefers fertile, well-drained soil and as much sunlight as possible. Plant it in your flower bed for maximum enjoyment, but a few tucked into containers will also work; they will flower less, though.

Malva — Common Mallow

Malva sylvestris 'Zebrina'



When we first view these flowers, we assume they are Hollyhocks or small Hibiscus. Looks are deceiving, for they are different. Malva flowers are smaller and less 'gaudy' (for want of a less mean-spirited word) than some Hollyhock blossoms.

Easy to grow, malva plants are biennials but can be short-lived perennials when you consistently remove spent flowers. Each blossom can produce an excessive amount of seeds, weakening the plant for the winter. You can grow it as a summer-blooming annual by sowing seeds indoors very early in the spring.

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

This variety was popular in cottage gardens years ago but is less common in today's gardens. Which begs the question: who can resist an attractive, easy-to-grow, quick-to-bloom plant like this?

Historically native to northern Europe and Africa and now spread elsewhere, Malva (like many favorite plants) has numerous nicknames, such as High Mallow or Striped Mallow. Another unusual nickname is "Cheeses" or "cheese plant." No, that is not a bizarre typo-mistake. Why name it after a dairy product? The plant has nothing to do with making cheese, but the seeds look like cheddar or gouda cheese wheels.

When nothing else can surprise you in flower gardening, now the subject of cheese wheels arises. And now my mouth is watering, and my tummy is growling. Time to raid the fridge! Where's that box of crackers?

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

Matthiola — Stocks

Matthiola incana



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Now we come across a cherished flower garden plant that offers “the best of both worlds.” By this, I mean they can be both splendid flower garden subjects and cut flowers prized by florists.

Some varieties are annuals or biennials, while others “may” become perennials. Some types can survive another growing season if you take the time to cut off most of the spent flowers to prevent life-sapping seed formation.

First, here's a quick review of these flowers. The powerful scent varies from vanilla, nutmeg, spring hyacinths, and lilacs to lilies and jasmine. Those fragrances are shocking since these plants are in the smelly Mustard family (once again, think of overcooked broccoli). These plants are sure to be your best investment for a happier summer!

Classic flowering Stock plants provide plenty of pink, purple, yellow, red, or white single- or double-petaled blooms. They begin blooming in spring and last through the end of the summer, offering outstanding color and fragrance for almost the entire growing season.

One commonly grown variety is **Ten Week Stock** (sold in the USA), named for the approximate time to bloom from seed—give or take a few days. It is a garden annual, heavily perfumed, and available in many colors. Growers advise sowing these varieties in mid-spring. Some mixes include the **Double-Flowered Stocks**. They are a favorite since the flowers are sterile, and they keep producing more flowers over the summer. They may overwinter, providing more enjoyment next summer.

In spring and summer, you can self-sow the seeds in a bed or border. Grow these plants in a sunny location with well-drained, fertile soil. Most varieties grow to no more than 2 feet tall and slightly less wide.

Other varieties, often called “**Brompton Stocks**,” take longer to develop and are treated as biennials. In cool-temperate regions, they are generally sown in summer (June and July) to flower the following spring. The great showy spring floral display compensates for the extra trouble of overwintering the plants. Brutal winters may cause some mortality unless you provide a well-drained, sheltered site. A south-facing house-foundation exposure bed is recommended to temper harsh, frigid northern winds.

These biennial types can reach three feet and are also bushy. They make outstanding, long-lasting cut flowers.

Another type of Stock is **East Lothian** (originating in southern Scotland), which cannot decide whether to be annual or biennial. This strain blooms later in the cooler summer and fall.

One significant caveat to growing these plants: they tend to dislike hot, muggy summer weather. Most Stock varieties prefer cooler temperatures

(generally less than 80 degrees F.) Count on having a splendid spring and early summer display before summer's heat.

Matthiola — Evening Scented Stock

Matthiola longipetala bicornis



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These plants look weedy and grow only a foot tall, but can become bushy. The small flowers stay closed and droopy during the day, but before sunset, they open into a blend of white and light lavender-blue or mauve. They then release a fantastic perfume throughout the evening and night.

For many people, the scent evokes notes ranging from vanilla and nutmeg to spring hyacinths and lilacs, and finally to lilies and jasmine. The perfume is

at its best in cool, calm air. If you plant it near an open window, the heavenly scent will saturate your home — well, maybe not that much unless you have a one-room house.

This Stock is native to Europe (now reported to be very rare in the wild) and has been a favorite for generations of gardeners — until now. Strangely, it is not that common to find — even in seed stores or catalogs.

This plant is best sown outdoors from seed. Still, you can also raise it in pots and transplant it carefully to avoid damaging the roots. Occasionally, cut back the spent flower stalks to promote new blooms.

Grow in sun to partial shade in rich, well-drained soil, in containers, or as seeds scattered in the garden.

Mirabilis — Four O'Clocks or Marvel-of-Peru

Mirabilis jalapa



This plant's Latin name means “marvelous”, referring to its floral beauty. These fragrant flowers are commonly called Marvel of Peru, as they are native to this area of South America. The colorful flowers remain closed most of the day, opening only in the late afternoon. In partial shade, they may open after four o'clock. However, I would not set a clock by them.

This common (and better-known) species was prevalent in 19th-century gardens but has, sadly, been less common today. One reason is that nurseries now offer many more bedding flowers that are better suited to bedding and

stay small. But new, exciting varieties of *Mirabilis* are available to grow today; their flowers can be solid white, pink, red, or yellow. A multicolored variety called the **Broken Colors Series** (shown above) has stripes, splashes, smears, spots, and blemishes of different colors on the same flower.

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

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

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

Moluccella — Bells of Ireland

Moluccella laevis



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Here is an unusual, hardy perennial (zones 6 to 9) or annual that past gardeners enjoyed. Unfortunately, this plant is rarely grown now. The primary reason is that the whole plant is green. That's it — no other color. Another reason is that it's one of those “out of sight, out of mind” flowers—if you can call them flowers. What look like clusters of bell-shaped green blossoms are leaves called calyxes (or sepals). The real blossoms are tiny, usually white, and nestled inside the calyxes.

Historically, this plant received its name (mistakenly, it seems) from Linnaeus, the guy who developed Latinized binomial nomenclature for naming plants and animals. He described it as being native to the Indonesian Moluccas. Actually, he was off by several thousand miles because this plant is native to the regions around Turkey and southern Russia. Linnaeus, you're slipping, man. Get with the program.

Mr. Linnaeus also coined their familiar name, Bells of Ireland, since the flower spikes and bracts reminded him of church bells throughout Ireland.

What makes florists giddy over this plant is not only its emerald green color but also its use as “filler material” for inclusion in floral arrangements. One day, eons ago, I was at a funeral service and looked at the floral displays for the dear departed — who I don't now recall. Tucked amongst the carnations, chrysanthemums, and lilies were stems of this unusual plant. I remember thinking the florist added weird-looking weeds. Later, since I was curious about identifying that “weed,” I learned that it was once a commonly grown garden plant. To borrow a word from Homer Simpson, **“D’oh!”**

Anyway, back to the main point of this discussion about this flower: *Moluccella*, when grown in a sunny, well-drained, fertile area of the garden, can tower to about three feet, with several side branches bearing many of those green sepal-bells.

You can grow this plant from seed, but it will need a period of cold soil conditions to germinate. I haven't seen larger garden centers sell this plant.

Myosotis — Woodland or Common Forget-Me-Not

Myosotis sylvatica



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This is an all-purpose plant you can raise for general “cottage” gardening, rock gardens, and, more attractively, woodland gardens. This species has five gorgeous sky-blue petals, each highlighted with a yellow center. Some pink-and-white varieties are available, but the blue shades are hands down the most popular.

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

not an eyesore. Because they stay low, they spread outward in blue carpets that bloom from spring to early summer. Other *Myosotis* species (*M. scorpiodes* and *M. alpestris*) are perennial and bloom further into summer and early fall. Still, *sylvatica* is by far the most attractive.

These plants prefer partly shady, moist, well-drained soil. The general recommendation is that the more sunlight, the more water the plants need. Deep shade is also not advised, but the Goldilocks Zone is growing 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. And here you think botanical history is boring.

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, of course) who, while picking bouquets of these flowers near a stream for his fair damsel girlfriend, slipped and fell into the water and began to drown. With the weight of his armor, he began to sink rapidly. Before his watery demise, he threw his pretty bouquet to her, and, instead of shouting, “*HEY LADY, 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).

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. From a distance, the total effect looks like blue gemstones suspended in 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. Today, many new gardeners have no idea who Gertrude was or anything about this plant, which is a shame.

Nigella blooms primarily in late spring or early summer with blue, purple, pink, and white blossoms. Long-established gardeners value the mass of misty foliage and blossoms, as it can 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 value in 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.

Oenothera — Evening Primrose

Oenothera odorata; pallida; glazioviana



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

Native throughout North America, Oenothera likes to grow in disturbed ground—such as abandoned fields, roadsides, drainage ditches, vacant lots, and other less-than-ideal locations. In fertile garden soil, it grows and blooms exceptionally well.

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

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

A few recommended varieties to grow in the garden include **Fragrant Delight** (*Oenothera odorata*), which has a delightful blend of large, yellow-pink-orange flowers. All colors are present, just like a sunset, releasing a gorgeous honeysuckle-lemon perfume into the air. Oh, what a pleasure to smell these blossoms on warm summer evenings!

This plant grows upward to over two feet tall, then plops over onto the ground. From there, it makes numerous side branches and shoots, which extend upward and form many other flower spikes. This variety blooms all summer.

Another evening-blooming species/variety is **Innocence** (*Oenothera pallida*) shown above. It is perennial in warmer locations (Zones 7 to 10). We should consider it an annual for colder areas. This stunning variety forms HUGE, white flowers with a yellow center. As the blossoms age overnight, they turn light pink!

The perfume they exude is incredible — a mixture of honeysuckle and lemon. The plants are low-growing but become bushy, covered with these large blossoms all summer.

Another species is *Oenothera glazioviana*, with large yellow blossoms that slowly open (like in time-lapse photography) right before your eyes in the evening. I watched the flowers open at 8:30 pm, and ten minutes later, they

were fully open. No fooling! The blossoms exude a dazzling lemon, lily, and honeysuckle-blended perfume.

Each plant grows to four feet tall with hundreds of flowers over the summer, so plan a rowdy garden party each evening. Your neighbors won't mind, will they? They may think you are crazy (again, hardcore gardeners usually are) staring at these plants each evening.

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

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

Garden centers may not offer potted plants, but wildflower catalogs may offer seeds.

Paeonia — Peony

Paeonia lactiflora



These enduring perennials, known for their large, fluffy flowers on leafy stems, bloom from mid-spring to early summer. Unlike many perennials in this ebook, you only have a short season to enjoy their massive flowers. You may think, “Why bother growing them?” The answer is the gorgeous colors and scents of those billowy flowers.

You may also think every gardener would plant several peonies, but that is not the case. Once wildly popular, these semi-woody plants have lost notoriety. One major reason is ants. Yes, people assume the large flower buds attract the neighborhood ant population.

Well, not that many, but ants are usually found on the buds; they don't feed on them, but aphids do. Aphids suck the sweet sap from the buds and excrete (urinate) even sweeter liquid that the ants love to drink. Ants "milk" these aphids like cows and enjoy this clear, ultra-sweet liquid. This is downright sick. The point is: Mother Nature sometimes accepts weird buggy behavior on our beautiful flowers.

Within a few generations of gardeners, peonies were either banished far from the house and into the distant "back 40" plot, or elected never to be planted. It's time to get over it.

Another prominent reason peonies have become less accepted in today's gardens is their huge blooms. Over countless years of breeding, peony blossoms have become larger and heavier. So heavy that the flower stems will bend over to touch the ground. Not lovely when covered in mud, but what can a gardener do?

One easy method is to buy metal support rings (similar to tomato cage wire hoops) to hold the developing flower stems and buds upright. Once done, enjoy the outstanding colors and fragrances of your peonies.

Many varieties have rich scents such as lemons, roses, honey, spices, and musk. Sometimes, a hybrid type may reek of rotting fish. Do extensive research before buying any peony, so you don't end up with something that smells so disgusting.

To start enjoying future flowers as early as within four years, plant all peonies in full sunlight and well-drained, fertile soil. They are hardy from zones 3 to 8.

Some garden centers offer peonies as bare woody roots or in large containers. Online nurseries offer old heirloom and gorgeous modern varieties. All varieties, whether double or single-petaled, provide fantastic beauty in your garden and when displayed on an indoor table.

Papaver — Iceland Poppy

Papaver nudicaule



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Gardeners have grown several poppy varieties over the years. Some are still available, especially the fully double-petal varieties.

While many of these poppies are annuals, this species takes honors as a perennial, with a few caveats. This species is temperamental and can be ‘somewhat’ challenging to grow. It can be slow-growing, so have patience when raising the seedlings. This may explain why it is less common now than in the past.

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

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

You can never go wrong having poppies growing in your garden.

Persicaria — Kiss Me Over the Garden Gate; Prince's Feather

Persicaria orientalis, formerly named *Polygonum orientale*



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If there were an award for the best-nicknamed garden flower, this plant would certainly be in nomination. It would most likely win. It begs the question, “How did it become named as such?” Good question, but bad answers. No one knows who named this plant this way, or why.

Its other common name is Prince's Feather to further confuse us. Certain suggestions, over the ages, relate to how the tall stems lean over the height of a garden wall, "somehow" allowing separated lovers to kiss each other. Never mind. I know, it doesn't make sense. Nor does the convoluted explanation of what a Prince's Feather signifies.

Originally from several Asian locations, this annual plant eventually became a bona fide garden sensation when it was discovered and soon afterward spread throughout Europe and eventually North America. In today's vernacular, it went viral, and everyone wanted to get the seeds and grow it. It is rumored that Thomas Jefferson went completely "gaga" over it and planted seeds in his Monticello flower gardens. That may not be true, but Tommy was especially keen on planting all sorts of fascinating, newly introduced flowers.

"Kiss Me" plants are rarely offered in garden centers, so your best bet in growing them is by sowing seeds. One caveat, though, is that they need a cold stratification period (a moist, cold period for a few weeks) to stimulate germination. The best time to sow them outdoors is in the fall, and germination will begin on warmer late-spring days. For earlier indoor germination, refrigerate the seeds in a moist paper towel for a month, then sow them in small pots on a heating mat. Grow the seedlings under plant lights.

By mid-summer, the plants will begin to flower with long, drooping, pendulous, rose-pink to red florets. Don't be surprised if your plants grow over three feet tall and become bushy.

Phlox — Annual Phlox

Phlox drummondii



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Our tall summer-blooming perennial Garden Phlox (*Phlox paniculata*), spring-blooming wildflower Woodland Phlox (*Phlox divaricata*), and the ground-covering Creeping Phlox (*Phlox subulata*) are always popular, very hardy inhabitants of most flower gardens. Unfortunately, this annual phlox is not included. Although flaunting bright red, rose-pink, bluish-purple, blended colors and pure white petals, this species has been relegated to the lonely, whispered-about area of gardening history.

Once popular many years ago, this species “somehow” fell out of popularity. It has the popular qualities all gardeners swoon over: a native wildflower of the United States, easy to germinate, long-blooming (with only occasional deadheading of spent blooms), compact-growing, and suitable for containers. What’s not to like?

Well, not much is documented about this plant anymore. In fact, when was the last time you realized an annual phlox existed? It does, so why not try it on for size — placed front and center in your garden?

Similar to the perennial species, but with less compact, conically shaped flowerheads, Annual Phlox is more “loosely” branching. Like the perennial cousins, it prefers plenty of sunlight and well-drained, fertile soil. Seeds can still be found (fortunately) in some mail-order catalogs. Transplantable potted plants are sadly absent in larger garden centers. Fortunately, early indoor sowing of seeds or outdoor sowing after the last spring frost is easy.

Pimpernel — Blue Pimpernel; Poor Man's Barometer

Anagallis monellii “Skylover”



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

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

He adopts a red flower, *Anagallis arvensis*, better known as a Scarlet Pimpernel, as his secret identity "nickname" — just like Spider-Man, 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. Native to the Mediterranean region, we can classify it as a maintenance-free plant, as it grows well in dry, sunny locations. It appreciates fertile, well-drained soil and occasional watering for better growth and blooms, 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 a good border edging and outstanding container plant. If only it were hardy—only to Zone 9—but it is an annual in most gardens.

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

Primula — Primrose

*Primula x polyantha; acaulis; elator; auricula;
veris; plus, more*



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The colorful Primroses are always a welcome sight in early spring. Most people see these magnificent flowers not in a garden but at 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 in every color and shade overwhelms our eyes. Purchasing all those plants is tempting! I am sure

there is at least one irresistible color you can't live without for enjoying indoors and later plan to plant outside — somewhere.

The sad truth about these beautiful plants is most will end up in the trash or compost heap. Many people with little interest in gardening get bored with the plants after they finish blooming. Too many people expect all plants to remain in bloom and then dispose of them when they don't re-bloom. Primula is no exception; if not the worst casualty.

Some lucky plants find a home in a flower garden, but we may grow them in the wrong area. Primroses constantly need moist soil. If the ground dries, these plants will severely wilt and may not recover. They prefer partly shady locations, especially near woodlands or stream banks. In early spring, they will appreciate full sunlight, but as the season transitions into summer, they desperately need shade. They love cool conditions, as most Primula species originated in alpine valley locations — especially the Himalayan Mountain valley areas.

So, which Primula plant can we plant in our shady gardens? If you have the area, you can plant over 400 (and counting) species and hybrid varieties available worldwide. Most species are hardy from zones 5 to 8. A few readily available species you can grow are *Primula vulgaris* (Wild Primrose), *acaulis* (the English Primrose), *elator* (Oxlip Primrose), *auricula* (Mountain Cowslip), and *veris* (Cowslip Primrose).

These species' names sound like a group of gardening comic book superheroes. To save your time reading (and wear-and-tear on my typing index fingers), I will allow you the honor to research (via Google) these species and all the other beautiful forms more in-depth.

These species have hybridized extensively. 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 Primula species. Specialty nurseries and seed houses usually carry rare species. Growing plants from seed can be challenging.

For many centuries English cottage gardens contained Primroses of all kinds and colors. Some Primroses were more popular than others, including many

unusual double petal varieties of the common *Primula vulgaris*. Many of those old double varieties are no longer with us. Still, some were eventually rediscovered and propagated through modern tissue culture technology. You may encounter a few newer varieties in large garden centers.

Salpiglossis — Painted Tongue or Velvet Trumpet Flower

Salpiglossis sinuata

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

Introduced from regions of the southern Chilean Andes in 1824, this magnificent plant took the gardening world by surprise, then by disbelief, and finally by wide-eyed wonder. Unfortunately, this plant has never been popular with present-day gardeners. 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 a single color, while others have contrasting colors or are overlaid with geometric patterns and veins. Some named varieties (the best ones) are wickedly gorgeous, appearing like stained-glass etched or overlaid with shining gold. Three excellent Salpiglossis varieties are shown below.



Salpiglossis ‘Kew Blue’ — This variety originated from the world-famous Kew Gardens in England. If you love blue or purple flowers, this variety should be your number one choice to grow in your garden. The outer regions of each flower are dark blue but become almost black towards the center. The bright yellow anthers offer a perfect focal point. This plant is the best-known and most commonly grown Salpiglossis variety.



Salpiglossis ‘Red Bicolor’ — Another beautiful variety, this one flaunts velvety-red blooms highlighted with molten-gold centers and veins. It’s a “hot-hot-hot” flower for your cool-looking (as in a great-looking) garden.



Salpiglossis ‘Royale Purple Bicolor’ — This aptly named variety sports blue-purple blossoms with bright golden-yellow veins. Younger flowers are wine-red, but royal purple with gold rules the display. The effect is gorgeous!

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

The plants grow to over two feet tall in full sun to partial shade (especially in hot regions). With a mountainous heritage, they prefer cooler conditions. Warm temperatures and high humidity will limit their full blooming

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

In all my years of gardening, I have never found this plant offered for sale in garden centers. Petunias get more emphasis since they are easier to grow. Seeds are available in many seed catalogs, but I don’t recommend the “mixed-seed” option; flower color from mixes can be disappointing. Always buy named varieties, like those listed above.

Silene — Maltese Cross; Jerusalem Cross

Silene chalcedonica (formally *Lychnis chalcedonica*)



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The common nickname for this perennial sounds like an unmade Dashiell Hammett novel sequel or a John Huston movie version of *The Maltese Falcon*. I wonder if Humphry Bogart would have agreed to star in it. Oh well, we can only imagine.

What we can happily admire is the absolutely gorgeous scarlet-red flower clusters. Not only that, but these flowers are famously shaped like a cross! Holy mole. The petals of each tiny blossom split, forming the shape of a

cross. Well, not an exact match, but close. No wonder this plant was popular to plant in countless cottage gardens for generations of Christian gardeners.

Blooming from early to late summer, its eye-catching, brilliant red flower heads attract all neighborhood eyes and pollinators such as butterflies and, especially, hummingbirds. It thrives in full sun to partial shade and in well-drained, fertile soil. Made for the back of the border, it reliably grows up to four feet tall and becomes bushy. Once established, it tolerates the occasional drought. The icing on the cake is that this plant is ultra-hardy to zone 3.

Goodness, what more can we ask from this plant? Well, how about the plant asking us to plant more of it in our gardens? I am just as guilty as, maybe, most of you reading this ebook. Unfortunately, I've never grown it. I haven't seen it blooming in other gardens, including park plantings, or in garden centers or nurseries. Whoa! What has happened to its old popularity? Good question, but a terrible answer: it has been bypassed by our more common perennials. This is a sad excuse.

Silene — Night-Flowering Catchfly

Silene noctiflora



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This plant is an English wildflower that has become naturalized in many areas of the world, or, in other words (being less polite), it is A WEED. Heaven's to Betsy! Lock the doors! Actually, this is a pretty tame sort of weed. It is classified as an annual, but it can be a perennial in warmer areas.

The small flowers are pure white and release a very strong but sweet perfume in the evening and night air for most of the summer. Clip off spent flower stalks to encourage more blooms and prevent excess seed production.

It grows over 2 feet tall but becomes bushy over the summer. The name “Catchfly” refers to the sticky properties of the stems and leaves. The little ‘hairs’ on the stems and leaves have a sticky substance that repels or adheres little bugs like aphids, whitefly, and other little beasties. For us, there is no need to worry about this — enjoy the sweet perfume in the evenings.

Seeds may be found in wildflower catalogs or on websites.

Tagetes — Signet Marigolds

Tagetes tenuifolia



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This dwarf marigold, around for ages, is very bushy, with finely laced, fern-like, deep green leaves that have a strong lemony fragrance when handled.

Look for varieties called Signet Marigolds, such as **Lemon Gem** and **Orange Gem**, for their small, single, bright yellow-to-orange blossoms that cover the plant through most of the summer. Many people who don't like marigolds (because of their pungent leaf smell) enjoy these types not only for their lemony smell but also for their delicate nature.

This variety makes a good container, window box, and bedding subject. Plant it where you can occasionally brush the leaves to release that wonderfully strong citrus perfume.

The plant grows to about 12 inches tall and wide. Plant it in full to partial sunshine and rich soil.

You can easily find seeds of these varieties and others in many catalogs and websites. Strangely, they are not as popular as the commonly offered, if not overused, French and African Marigolds.

Viola — Johnny Jump Up

Viola tricolor



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The old “mighty (or great) oaks from little acorns grow” saying certainly applies to this little viola. Our springtime favorite, the large-petaled Pansy, was created, in part, using this “little tyke” Viola as its botanical foundation.

As a small, spreading, European wildflower, this species eventually became a worldwide gardening sensation several generations ago. The abundant flowers can be blue, purple, yellow, or white. There are several multi-colored genetic variations.

So beloved, it has plenty of confusing, head-scratching, comical, and endearing nicknames. What many of these common names imply is still debated. Cases in point are: Heartease, Heart's Delight, Jack-Jump-Up-and-Kiss-Me, Tickle-My-Fancy, Three Faces in a Hood, Love-In-Idleness, Come-and-Cuddle-Me, and the most confusing — Pink Of My John. Yikes! What the hell does that mean? OK, let's move on...quickly.

Another name, fortunately, more accurate, is Wild Viola. Anyway, we are all so fortunate that Johnny Jump Up is our current favorite nickname.

This “mini-me violet” has gardeners undecided about how to classify it. You can grow it as an annual, biennial, or perennial. It depends on where you live and your climate. No matter what it is labeled, it grows abundantly and spreads almost everywhere if the soil conditions favor its growth. Is it invasive? I suppose it can be, but let's agree it's a great, colorful groundcover, foremost in spring and even into the summer.

If this little viola is so beloved, blooms abundantly, and has a wide color range (with purple being a strong preference), why is it not grown more often nowadays? One reason is our strong temptation to grow larger flowers. Cue the introduction of the Pansy.

In the early 1800s, an estate owner named Lord Gambier, living near London, asked his hired gardener, William Thomson, to cross-pollinate different little violas — more than likely *Viola tricolor* (aka “Johnny”). Gambier wanted to breed his own new type of viola to brag about to his gardening friends. He got his wish.

One eye-catching plant developed with weird-looking, medium-sized, semi-blotched flowers. I am unsure of the flower color, but the blotchiness was new and had the “WOW!” factor. Mr. Thomson then self-pollinated each generation (over several years — imagine that!), and the flowers became larger in petal size and darker face-blotchiness. Needless to say, his refined flowers eventually became all the rage to grow.

Historically, the name pansy applied to various *Viola* species. Still, this more significant, multi-colorful-flowered type with black blotches became “the modern pansy.”

Throughout the 19th century, pansy shows competed with rose and orchid shows to showcase outstanding, wildly colorful new varieties. Eventually, consumer demand for regular folk to raise pansies took hold, and seed companies soon began developing new strains — which brings us to the many colorful varieties sold today. Go to any nursery or garden center and see what William Thomson could only imagine.

Johnny-Jump-Ups may surpass pansies in abundant bloom but not in petal size. But Johnny still offers the flamboyant color range passed down to the pansy.

Conclusion

Unlike a few generations ago, today's larger plant breeder companies develop several new flower varieties each year. Some plants are instantly loved by garden centers and the public to become bestsellers for many years. Sadly, many others eventually fade into obscurity.

Fortunately, these neglected plants keep growing in some established gardens worldwide and are eventually rediscovered. The plants listed above (and there are many more) are lucky to have survived and remain available. Some gardeners feel they offer a necessary link to the past via their special qualities and interesting histories.

Part of the fun of gardening is discovering new plants each spring at garden centers, smaller nurseries, and in seed catalogs. You may be surprised to learn that some of those new plants are the original older types first grown many years ago, but partially improved in quality.

What once was old is new again only if you allow yourself the curiosity, determination, and excitement to include these beautiful blossoms in your flower gardens. Let's grow them again!

Thank you for reading this ebook

I hope you have enjoyed this pdf file on discovering and, hopefully, growing these antique garden flowers. Take the time (and patience) to grow these outstanding flowers in your beds and borders. You will be glad you did!

Please visit my author website, [G. Edwin Varner](#), for my other gardening ebook pdf files 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 led him to earn 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 that published colorful but expensive pictorial catalogs, his frugal catalog described the flowers he grew in detail. He once said, "I write a thousand words worth a picture in my catalogs."

Today, he writes in the same style (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.

Read more at [G. Edwin Varner's site](#).