



Alliums - Onions as Ornamentals

Not all onions need to be relegated to the vegetable garden. Simple to grow in any sunny, well-drained spot, ornamental Alliums sport attractive, globe-shaped flowers and critter-resistant foliage. Both flowers and foliage add contrasting texture to the garden, and the flowers of most varieties are great for cutting and drying.

Alliums range in size from diminutive varieties less than a foot tall to statuesque giants four or more feet in height. Although most bloom in pink, blue or purple shades, some varieties sport yellow or white flowers. Foliage might be bold and strappy, low growing and curly, or thin and grass-like.

Alliums can be purchased as bulbs for fall planting or as potted plants throughout the growing season. Plant bulbs in good garden soil, two to three times as deep as the bulb is wide. Started plants should be planted at the same depth as they were in the pot, and this can be done at any time throughout the growing season. Fertilize Alliums once in early spring, and deadhead spent blooms if seeding is not desired.

Although they are easy to transplant and divide, most varieties can be left undisturbed for many seasons.

Plant Alliums among perennials, annuals and other bulbs, or group them together in clumps and let them naturalize. Large-flowered types look good in front of shrubs of a contrasting foliage color. In some varieties, the leaves die back as the season progresses.

These are best planted amongst leafy perennials that will hide the deteriorating foliage. Depending on the type, Alliums bloom anywhere from late spring to fall. Plant several varieties to extend the show.

For late spring bloom, try *Allium moly*. This low-growing onion reaches only 10 to 12" tall, and its bright yellow, starry flowers look cheery when planted amongst other late spring-blooming bulbs. Intersperse it with the rabbits' favorite - tulips - to discourage nibbling. This variety also looks good naturalized, and it's tolerant of dry shade. Left undisturbed, it will eventually spread to form colonies.

Allium aflatuence blooms around the same time, in late May to

early June, but its flowers reach a much greater height, on stems up to three or four feet tall. *Purple Sensation* bears rich, dark purple, perfectly round flower clusters. It is pretty when planted with late-flowering, tall tulips or with leafy perennials that will fill in and cover the onion's foliage as it fades. This variety is a good one to harvest for cut flowers, as its large blooms make a nice focal point in arrangements.

Globemaster bears spectacular deep violet flowers in dense clusters as large as 6 to 8" across. These are held on strong stems 30 to 40" tall. Foliage is dark green and strap-like, appearing before the flowers.

Allium christophii (*Stars of Persia*) has even larger flowers than *Globemaster*. Sometimes, clusters can reach almost a foot in diameter! Flowers bloom in early summer. They are pinkish purple, and the heads dry well. The strap-like, gray-green leaves appear before the flowers, and are short-lived. Grow this onion where the dying foliage will be camouflaged by neighboring plants.

As its name implies, *Allium*

Allium giganteum (Giant Onion) is grow.

perhaps the tallest onion of them

all. Its 4 to 5" lilac pink flowers

are borne on stems four or more

feet tall. Plant this tall onion in

the back of the border where the

blooms will be showcased and

the deteriorating foliage will be

hidden. The flowers of giant

onion are long lasting as cut

flowers if harvested as they just

begin to open. Stems may need

support to help hold up the dense

flower heads.

For summer blooms in a true blue

color, plant *Allium caeruleum*.

The delicate, globe-shaped

flower clusters of this plant are

borne on stiff stems reaching

about 1½' tall. The mid green,

grass-like foliage dies back

before the flowers appear; inter-

mingle this variety with perennials

in the garden bed. This Siberian

native is very hardy and easy to

For a totally different look, plant

Allium senescens *Glaucum*. Its

gray-green foliage is attractive,

and twisted in an interesting,

swirly pattern. Reaching only

about 6 to 8" tall, this variety

looks good in groups along the

front of the border where its

unusual growing habit can be

appreciated. Small pink flowers

in mid summer are an added

bonus.

Allium cernuum (Nodding Pink

Onion) is a native prairie plant,

easy to grow in any warm, sunny

site. Its unusual, pendulous pink

flower clusters are borne on 12 to

24" stems above the grassy

foliage in mid summer. Clump

forming, this is a good choice for

rock gardens.

Carry on the color by planting

Allium thunbergii Ozawa. This

variety bears violet flowers on 8"

stems in September to October.

Its fall foliage is colorful, too,

turning a burnished, reddish

bronze.



The twisted, gray-green foliage of *Allium senescens* *Glaucum* is perfectly placed at the front of the border.