



Crazy for Columbines

Columbines attract attention of people and hummingbirds alike. Their unique and sassy flowers are like none other, and they add an old-fashioned charm to perennial borders or woodland gardens.

Columbines are part of the family botanically known as *Aquilegia*. The spurs of the flowers were thought to resemble the claws of the eagle – *aquila* in Latin – hence the genus name. There are many species in the *Aquilegia* family that range in size from a diminutive six inches to two-and-half feet tall. They also vary in color from white to yellow, pink to red, and blue to purple.

Regardless of species, columbines bloom for a month or more in spring or early summer and grow happily in well-drained soil rich with organic material. They also prefer a place in the garden that receives light shade and plenty of moisture. Many are drought tolerant, however, once established in the garden.

Columbines are generally short-lived, but freely self-seed their own replacements. Leafminers may attack columbines leaving

tan squiggly lines as they tunnel through leaves. As unsightly as their damage may be, they seldom require chemical intervention. Simply pinch off and destroy affected leaves if they bother you.

I think columbines look best planted in groups of at least three

to five to complement spring-blooming perennials or late-blooming tulips. They are also lovely planted in a lightly shaded rock garden.

Here are some varieties you may want to add to your landscape this season.

Alpine Columbine

Aquilegia alpina, commonly called alpine columbine, is one of my favorites. It grows twelve to eighteen inches tall. Blue, noddling flowers adorn the gray-green foliage. Plant alpine columbine amongst a bulb planting of late-blooming pink and white tulips – gorgeous!



A blue, noddling flower of *Aquilegia alpina*

Wild Columbine

Wild columbine, botanically known as *Aquilegia canadensis*, is a knockout in the garden. Native to eastern North America, it produces noddling, red and yellow flowers on plants growing up to two feet tall. Pink Lanterns is a newer, shorter cultivar with pink and creamy white flowers.



Wild columbine is a knockout in the garden.

Golden Columbine

Aquilegia chrysantha, or golden columbine, is a tall grower reaching almost three feet tall. Spectacular in bloom, its bright yellow flowers are larger than some of its cousins. Plant this beauty with heartleaf brunnera (*Brunnera macrophylla*) or late-blooming white daffodils.

Fan Columbine

The leaves of *Aquilegia flabellata*, or fan columbine, are considera-

bly bluer and thicker than other stays a little shorter. Botanically (dark red, double flowers) . varieties. The plant is also more called *Aquilegia vulgaris*, these compact. Cameo Blue & White columbines are good garden and Cameo Pink & White are performers and may endure miniature versions barely better than other varieties.

reaching six inches tall. Nana **Columbine Hybrids**

White boasts white flowers on Columbines are free-loving plants eight to ten inch plants. Fan that create offspring with columbines are beautiful front-of- abandon. Many garden worthy the-border perennials.

European Columbine

European columbines give us Biedermeier (flowers in a mix of varieties with unusual deep colors including blue, purple and purple and near black flowers. white), Nora Barlow (double Black Barlow grows up to 30 flowers of red and pink tinged inches tall; William Guinness with green), and Ruby Port

The Songbird series includes types boasting brilliant colors. Blue Jay is deep blue; Cardinal is rich red; Dove is pure white; Goldfinch is bright yellow; and Robin is soft pink with white.

Whether you plant columbines for yourself or for the returning hummingbirds, their dazzling flowers will delight you both - equally.