



Grow Yarrow

If you're looking for an easy to grow plant that can stand up to summer's heat and drought, and survive Chicago's cold winters as well, look no further than Yarrow (*Achillea*). These old-fashioned, sun-loving perennials have been cultivated for many years, and with good reason. They thrive in any well-drained soil and look great when massed or combined with annuals, herbs, ornamental grasses or other perennials.



Most types of yarrow begin flowering in June and many varieties will continue throughout the summer if kept deadheaded. Their cheery, colorful flowers are held in flat-topped clusters. They are attractive to butterflies and are excellent for cutting and drying. Foliage is fern-like and aromatic, and it is also an attractive addition to cut arrangements.

Yarrows prefer full sun, good drainage and soil of low to moderate fertility. Divide them every couple of years in the spring or the fall. This will help renew the plants, and it will keep these vigorous growers from overtaking their more timid

neighbors. Cut back the plants after their first bloom to promote more flowers and encourage bushier, sturdier new growth.

If you would like to cut the flowers, harvest them when temperatures are cool, in the morning or evening. Pick blooms when half the florets are open.

After harvesting, slit the stems at the base and condition them in deep cool water before arranging. Fresh flowers will last for about a week. To dry the blossoms, hang them upside down out of direct sunlight, or simply stand the stems upright in a vase without water until they are dry. Both foliage and flowers can also be pressed or dried in a microwave for use in craft projects.

Yarrow can be grown from seed or from started plants, but seedlings may be variable. For the truest color it is best to purchase known varieties or divide your preferred selections. Yarrow is available in many colors, including yellow, red, pink,

white and bronze shades. Although most types grow to about 18 to 24" high, some varieties stay close to the ground, with foliage that reaches only 2 to 4" in height. One such plant is *Achillea ageratifolia*, or Greek Yarrow. Its low-growing, mat forming, softly hairy foliage is a muted gray-green. It flowers earlier than most other yarrows, in May to June, when snowy white flowers cover the dense, toothed foliage. Because of its diminutive stature and tolerance for lean soils, this plant would be a good addition to a rock garden.

For soft, lemon yellow flowers, it is hard to beat *Anthea*. Reaching up to 2 ½' in height, *Anthea* bears its long-lasting blooms on erect stems that are ideal for cutting. Its clump forming, silver colored foliage is attractive, too. If you prefer your yellows on the brighter side, check out the golden yellow flowers of *Coronation Gold*—flower clusters reach up to 4" across and are very long lasting, perfect for drying. Pick some of the fragrant, gray-green foliage, too. It makes a great addition to herbal bouquets. Either of these yellow varieties would look spectacular planted with a blue salvia like *May Night* or with *Russian Sage*.

Paprika and Terra Cotta feature deep, earthy flower shades. Paprika bears dusty red to red-orange flowers over fernlike green foliage on 2' plants. Terra Cotta is a taller variety, 2 to 3' tall, and it flowers in a fascinating combination of peachy pink to orange to russet shades over its ferny foliage. Combine either of these varieties with a coppery or red-toned ornamental grass for a smooth and colorful transition into fall.



Another variety to check out is Lilac Beauty. Growing about 18 to 24" tall, it holds its pretty violet flowers over ferny, dark green foliage.

Achillea ptarmica Nana Ballerina (sometimes known as Sneezewort) looks different from other types of yarrow, with more open clusters of tiny, double white flowers resembling baby's breath on 12 to 18" plants. It has a tendency to spread, so grow plants where they have some room. The flowers make good fillers in bouquets, and they continue to bloom for a long period of time.