



Plant Alliums Now for Late Spring Color

When we think about planting bulbs in the fall, our thoughts quickly turn to tulips and daffodils. While it's true the spring landscape wouldn't be the same without these harbingers of spring, alliums should also be included in bulb-planting schemes.

Alliums, commonly called ornamental onions, are cousins to onions and garlic but ornamental onions boast captivating sculptural flowers that sit atop slender sturdy stems in a broad range of colors and sizes. Cut some for floral arrangements and leave some in the garden where they will dry beautifully prolonging their garden appeal.

Ornamental onions are easy to grow in any well-drained soil asking only for a spot where they can bask in sunshine. The general rule for planting depth: plant them about three times the diameter of the bulb. In spring, green strappy leaves emerge forming an attractive clump.

In mid-spring as the leaves begin to yellow and wither, sturdy stems rise presenting globe-shaped flower heads in sizes from petite as a marble to as large as a softball. Alliums bloom from late spring to early summer depending on the variety. After their color has faded, the dried flower heads continue the show. The foliage, however, disappears completely soon after bloom.

Alliums are rarely bothered by pests or diseases, and they multiply offering more blooms year after year. And if all that is not enough to persuade gardeners to add alliums to their beds and borders, they have another notable characteristic: they are not appetizing to chipmunks, squirrels, voles or deer.

Now convinced to plant alliums, which varieties should you choose? Here are some favorites to consider.

Allium christophii, commonly called Star of Persia, grows up to two feet tall. Silvery amethyst flowers loosely form a softball-sized sphere. *Allium christophii* is pretty popping up from a bed of groundcover like periwinkle or planted in a mass all by themselves.

Commonly called the giant onion, *Allium giganteum* are among the tallest of the ornamental onion family. Large round heads of lilac-purple flowers bloom atop three to four feet tall stalks. Because of their size, giant onions are best planted in a spot sheltered from strong winds. *Allium giganteum* is gorgeous planted amongst white peonies.

Another titan of the family, *Globemaster* quickly grows up to 4 feet and boasts magnificent 10-inch orbs densely packed with silvery violet-purple flowers. Pair the impressive blooms of *Globemaster* with the equally dramatic blooms of a deep purple German iris ó a perfect partnership.



Every family has one, a member that just doesn't conform. Hair is that odd but wonderful member of the allium family. The flowers of Hair are not sphere-shaped like its siblings. Instead, they look like an allium having a bad hair day! Long, thin and green petals radiate from plum-colored centers on stems up to 2 feet tall. As cute and curious as this allium is in the garden, be sure to cut some for a unique bouquet.

Allium 'Purple Sensation' grows up to 30 inches tall. It produces lots of 2 to 4 inch globes jam-packed with reddish-violet flowers. Plant this allium within a mass of lady's mantle or a perennial geranium.

If white is your favorite color, choose Allium 'Mount Everest' Baseball-sized flower heads on three-foot stems are stunning when planted in front of a dark backdrop like a purple-leaved ninebark or dark green yews. It is also quite pretty when planted in mass partnered with a purple-flowered allium.

Commonly referred to as tumbleweed onion, Allium schubertii sports gigantic spheres - up to 12 inches across - filled with loosely-arranged rose-purple flowers. Plant this allium in a large group and enjoy the flowers resembling exploding fireworks when they bloom and the fluffy seedheads when they dry in the garden.

Alliums add color, texture and structure to the late spring and early summer landscape. They stand like works of art in perennial borders. When selecting bulbs at your local garden center remember spring is for more than just daffodils and tulips.



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