

Ornamental Alliums

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Onions “Alliums” are often thought of as being something we grow in the garden and enjoy in many dishes as a food enhancement. This they are however there are many ornamental varieties which can add a lot to any landscape plan. These are generally liked by bees, hummingbirds, catpillars and disliked by deer, rabbits and other critters.

Persian alliums are very hardy and have a big head and come in a variety of colors. These are one of the more common types seen and have a purple color to the almost 3 inch size head and can grow up to 2 feet tall. A hybrid selection ‘Mount Everest’ has 6 inch pure white snowballs.

Giant alliums can grow up to 4 feet tall and have 6 inch softball sized flower heads. These can also come in dark lavender shades to white. As a back drop to a garden area these can add quite a show piece with lots of distinctive character. These tend to bloom a little later in the spring than the Persian types.

The star of Persia ‘cristophii’ has 8 inch balls of loose shaggy, metallic blue-violet florets on a 15 inch stem. These alliums are quite showy with their open loose heads compared to the other varieties of allium. The allium ‘schubertii’ is similar with rosy florets that seem to shoot out from the head giving them quite a unique look.

To contrast with these taller alliums with large heads are the Turkistan alliums. These desert plants really do well in a rock garden. They have some large leaves that are very attractive with a blue green color. The 6 inch silvery pink flowers are on 8 inch stems. Which makes these shorter alliums a great showpiece for smaller areas or lower growing plants or as a foreground plant for larger background ones.

The small headed alliums make up the majority of the 800 plus varieties of this species. ‘Millenium’ is a hybrid which produces 2 inch lavender colored heads later in the summer. This allium grows to about 12 inches height. Some of these hybrids are from cold areas such as Siberia or Mongolia. Such as ‘Melt’ which grows about 14 inches tall and has a profusion of compact light pink flowers. For a different color look for ‘Drumstick’ this deep red blossom is a small egg shape that shows up in early summer and grows on 12 inch stems. Then there is the steel blue color of ‘Blue Garlic’ which the 2 inch heads show up on 18 inch stems.

When planting alliums particularly the ornamental varieties they need really good drainage. So many of us in Wyoming will need to amend our soils so they drain well. The cold temperatures are not the main issue. Neither are the hot dry summers. However wet soggy soil will send most of these to their demise. The native types I have seen in the mountains will grow in moist conditions. By adding lots of sand and loam to at least 12 inches deep will help insure the livelihood of these plants.

So in a rock garden or in areas that can be amended more easily would be good areas to enjoy the many possibilities of this species. These plants can add a lot of diversity and texture to a garden area and will work very well particularly in a xeric setting. There certainly are many colors to choose from and heights and sizes to work in most any landscape design.

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