

## Norm's Notes

### Spring Blooming Plants from Seed

Before listing spring blooming plants that are easily grown from seed, a few things should be mentioned about the seed itself.

Everything listed below can be seeded outdoors. In every case loosen the soil, rake to a fine tilth, moving some soil to the side to later barely cover the seed. Be sure the soil surface is smooth, otherwise water will puddle in any dips making for uneven moisture dispersal. Importantly, keep the soil surface moist until the seed germinates. Even half a day of a dry surface can kill your seed. Outdoor drying is the most common cause of seed failure. Ideally, sow all the below plants by early April since at this time of year little supplemental watering is needed due to cool weather, snow and rain. Spring frost and snow are not fatal to these plants.

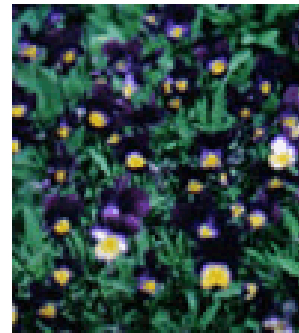
- All seed should be refrigerated before planting, preferably in an air tight container. The reason is that the seed will remain fresh. A refrigerator is dark preventing another common loss of seed viability namely, overheating in containers or packages left in sunlight. Furthermore, some seed needs a six week period of chilling before achieving consistent germination. Delphinium, larkspur, and columbine are the most common seeds needing pre-chilling. An air tight container is advised because most refrigerators self defrost and they can excessively dry out unprotected seed.

- All of the plants listed here, all should bloom by late June for a period of at least six weeks ...a minimum period of time that is considered ideal for garden color. Perennials and biennials will need a year of growth before flowering. Any of these plants alone would make a fine garden. All look their best if planted alone in large groups and given adequate spacing.

- All the below plants prefer full sun, and fertile, well drained soil. All have been chosen for ease of cultivation and length of bloom.

#### **Violets** (*Viola tricolor*)

An annual that is sadly overlooked because it is so common. But they are exceptional since they will bloom from early May to late October if properly cared for. They require constant moisture, and as much deadheading as you can manage. Though violas are commonly seen scattered among other flowers, they only achieve high visual beauty if planted alone in large groupings. They easily overseed. Thus in the spring it is advised that you turn over the soil to kill all but a very small number to germinate and be left uncrowded. Plants with room to grow become larger and bloom longer.



#### **German catchfly** (*Lychnis viscaria*)

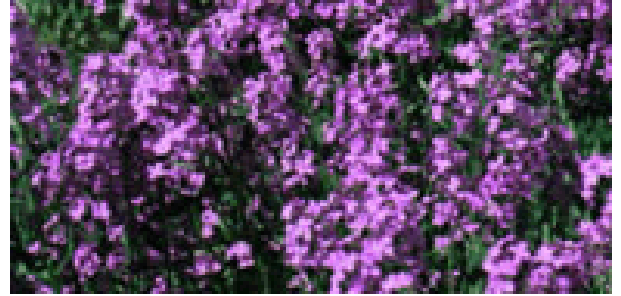
This perennial that lives for about 5 years has pink flowers with a hint of lavender. It is about 6-8 inches tall blooming in early June. Some seed will survive outdoors through a Montana winter. However, seed collected in mid-summer to be planted in spring will produce considerably more offspring.

#### **Flax** (*Linum perenne* or *Linum lewisii*)

Perennials that live for about 3 years. They flower in June with either sky blue or white flowers for a period of 8 weeks. But if they are cut to about a 4 inch height before the last of the flowers bloom, they will re-bloom in August with equal abandon. All the flowers drop off by mid-day, though the white variety lasts about 2-3 hours longer. If you plant both blue and white, keep them separate, otherwise all the flax will eventually be blue. Left to themselves, flax easily over seeds. Thus the seedlings should be separated to about a 5-7 inch spacing.

**Dame's rocket** (*Hesperis matronalis*)

This biennial, about 20-30 inches tall, commonly blooms lavender, though a white variant is available. The flowers look like phlox, and have a pleasant fragrance in cool mornings and evenings. Collect the seed when the long pods are tan and begin to split. The seed will survive outdoors through a Montana winter. Self-seeded plants usually grow too close together, thus you will have to transplant them to about a 5-6 inch spacing to allow full development. Keep the white variety separate from lavender unless you want bicolors and eventually a loss of the white over a few generations. Seed is hard to collect since once the pod opens, the slippery seed falls to the ground.



**Larkspur** (*Consolida ambigua*)

This annual, 12-24 inches tall, blooms in colors of red, pink, white, and various blues and purples. The flowers resemble delphiniums. If deadheaded, the plant will produce a second smaller flush of flowers. The



[above] Snow-in-summer with larkspur in background.

seed will survive outdoors through a Montana winter. Though the plants will tolerate crowding, they prefer about a 6 inch spacing.

**Snow-in-summer** (*Cerastium tomentosum*)

This perennial lives for about 3-5 years. It heavily blooms with white flowers that cover the blue-grey foliage. The foliage remains attractive when the plant is not in bloom. Only about 3 inches tall, it makes what many think is the best border plant for a Montana climate. If deadheaded before going to seed, the plant will bloom sporadically through the summer. If not deadheaded, collect the seed in mid-summer. The sprawling plant prefers 10-12 inches of space.

**Pretty clarkia** (*Clarkia puchella*)

This annual 6-10 inch clarkia was found by Lewis and Clark in 1806 and named after Captain William Clark. It blooms pink with a hint of lavender, and there is also a white variant. Seeds from this clarkia are the only clarkia seed that will survive outdoors through a Montana winter. The plants tolerate crowding, though a 5-6 inch spacing produces larger plants that bloom longer. Though there are about 36 species of clarkia; most are native to California. This Montana native has largely been lost in its native landscape. However, I have enough seed for those interested in helping reestablish the plant.

