

Choose Globe Amaranth for a Colorful Border



Photo to be credited to Marie Harrison.

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With the arrival of hot weather comes the end of some of the flowers that carried our gardens through the spring season. Gone are the snapdragons and petunias, the ornamental cabbages and kales, and the beautiful daffodils and narcissi of early spring.

It is not the time to give up on all flowers, however. Some species thrive in hot weather and grow and bloom until frost. One such plant, and one of my favorite annuals, is globe amaranth. My mother and aunts back in Mississippi called these plants bachelor's buttons. This points out the difficulty with common names, because cornflower (*Centaurea cyanus*) is also called bachelor's buttons.

Globe amaranth hails from Panama and Guatemala . Attractive clover-like blossoms in colors ranging from rose, purple, lavender, light pink, orange, and white are borne on stiff stems all summer long.

These plants are readily available from nurseries and garden centers. They may be bought in handy cell packs ready to be planted in the garden, or they can easily be started from seed. Although they prefer fertile soil, they are drought tolerant.

Plant globe amaranth in the hottest, driest part of the landscape. Expect them to grow from nine inches to two feet tall, depending on which variety is chosen. Place them twelve to eighteen inches apart for a massed effect. Insects are not usually a problem, but mildew may occur if plants are stressed by extreme drought or if they are watered with an overhead sprinkler and not allowed to dry thoroughly between waterings.

In fall before the first frost, I always pull up the plants and pick off the individual blossoms. I use them in dried floral crafts, in floral designs, or for a colorful addition to potpourris. Sometimes I glue hundreds of the individual flower heads onto styrofoam balls. These balls are pretty decorations set about the house, or they can be put on dowels and made into stunning topiaries. With a pretty ribbon added, they are a beautiful Christmas tree ornament. One of my favorite "contrived" flowers for creative floral designs is made from one of these

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balls.

Sometimes I simply put the collected flowers in a pretty basket or bowl and set them in a strategic place where I can admire them all winter. The following spring, I shred a few of the dried flowers into a new planting bed. After they sprout and are about two or three inches tall, I transplant them to permanent locations in the garden.

The flower head is made up of small inconspicuous individual flowers. The colorful bracts are what we see unless we examine them closely, but butterflies and insects have no trouble finding the tiny flowers. Dwarf selections 'Buddy' (purple) and 'Cissy' (white) top out at nine inches and are ideal edging plants. The cultivar named 'All Around' is a new, tall purple variety best used in the middle of the border.

The pink and white varieties blend well with almost any color, but some thought should be given to placement of the bright purple selections. Some sun coleuses have the same hue in the leaves, and planting them in close proximity is effective. Greens are an excellent foil, whether dark or light. I particularly enjoy the purple color contrasted with bright greens of goldmoss sedum (*Sedum acre*) or ornamental sweet potato 'Margarita'. They contrast nicely in form and texture with dwarf variegated mondo grass. 'White Profusion' zinnias and the silver of dusty miller combine pleasingly with them.

Truly a plant with multiple uses, globe amaranth is a pleasing addition to gardens. Grow them just for the beauty they provide in the flower bed, or pull them up at the end of the season and play with them all winter. Either way, you and your garden will be all the richer.

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