



# Cool Flower Method for Early Spring Blooms

Based on the teachings Lisa Mason Ziegler and  
the Gardeners Workshop Team.

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***You can't plant anything until after Mother's Day in our zone... or can you?***

This is a popular belief in the garden community but in reality, it is just not true. We can plant annuals in the fall for amazing early spring blooms.

Snapdragons, Nigella, Sweet Peas, Dianthus, Foxglove, Agrostemma, Larkspur, Poppies and Bachelor Buttons (among others) suffer in our hot, humid summers. Planting these out after Mother's Day impact their performance and will lead to a shorter or lackluster bloom cycle.

Lisa Mason Zeigler (based in Baltimore) has championed the Cool Flower Method – planting in the fall and overwintering some of our favorite spring blooms.

What is  
the Cool  
Flower  
Method?

Cool flowers, known as hardy annuals, live for one year and survive cold temperatures. Many are planted in the fall, to winter-over and produce blooms the following spring and summer. These flowers prefer becoming established and growing in cool conditions.

A number of the flowers discussed classified as “Hardy Annuals” have recently started acting as bi-annuals or short-lived perennials in our area (I will call them out in on the individual flower pages.

Almost all of the information for this presentation is either from Lisa’s book or website – The Gardeners Workshop – both are amazing resources (links in resource guide) or my personal growing experience, growing flowers with this method for 4 years.

# What is the Cool Flower Method?

- Direct Sow
  - This is planting seeds directly into your garden. Timing depends on the individual plant type.
- Transplanting
  - Starting seeds inside in late summer and transplanting seedlings out in early fall. You can also do the same for a second planting in late winter/early Spring
- Reseeding
  - Once you have these annuals started in your garden – most (because they are so hardy) will readily self – sow. So if you want to be a lazy gardener – you can just let them do their own thing, year after year. Just let some of them go to seed each year.

## 3 ways to Fall plant in the Cool Flower method

# Corn Cockle (Agrostemma)

- This is one of the first spring blooming annuals in my garden.
- It is a cut and come again flower – the more you cut it, the more blooms you will get.
- Excellent cut flower that comes in White (Ocean Pearl) and Purple (Purple Queen).
- **Winter Hardiness Zone: 7** (I have had these overwinter no issues)
- **Growing Method:** Direct Sow – 1/8 inch deep.
- **Days to Germination:** 7-14 days at 60-70°F
- **Recommended Seeding Window:** Last week of August – Early Sept
- **Sun Requirements:** Full Sun
- **Height:** 24" – 36"
- **Self Seeder:** Yes, but not aggressively
- **Notes:** Seeds are poisonous if eaten – so watch around children and pets



# Snapdragons (Antirrhinum)

- These hardworking flowers will give you blooms for months if you cut for cut flowers or deadhead regularly. They come in a wide variety of colors.
- There are broken into three classes of bloom times, Class 1 & 2 (Chantilly, Costa, Legend), Class 3 (Opus) and Class 4 (Potomac and Madame Butterfly)
- Excellent cut flowers.
  
- **Winter Hardiness Zone: 4** – Tough buggers
- **Growing Method:** Direct Sow – do not cover – needs light to germinate
- **Days to Germination:** 7-14 days at 70-75°F
- **Recommended Seeding Window:** Last week of August – Early Sept
- **Sun Requirements:** Full Sun
- **Height:** 24" – 36"
- **Self Seeder:** Yes, but because of how the seed pods are shaped, I recommend doing it by hand
- **Notes:** The varieties listed are cut flowers, so tall (up to 3 feet) so staking is recommended.



# Love –in-the-Mist (Nigella)

- Nigella is a super hard working – early bloomer on lovely fern like foliage. And comes in White, Pink and Blue. Highly recommend Delt Blue – every bloom is painted with splotches of blue, each flower is unique.
- While the flowers are lovely and amazing in bouquets, these are often grown for their striking seedpods for arrangements. These seed pods have SO MANY seeds.
- Since they are a delicate flower, they look great in big swatches.
- Recommend either netting or staking.
  
- **Winter Hardiness Zone:** 6 – I have grown these for the past 3 years and they have not failed.
- **Growing Method:** Direct Sow – do not cover – needs light to germinate
- **Days to Germination:** 7-14 days at 70-75°F
- **Recommended Seeding Window:** Last week of August – Early Sept
- **Sun Requirements:** Full Sun
- **Height:** 24” – 36”
- **Self Seeder:** Yes





# Bachelor Buttons (*Centaurea cyanus*)

- One of the easiest flowers to grow from seed for early Spring Blooms. They are one of the earliest bloomers in my garden.
- While best known for their bright blue variety, there are blends of Pinks/Whites (Classic Romantic) or Light Purple/Wine (Classic Magic) that are so lovely.
- Ladybugs are especially drawn to this flower, since there is nectar in the stem and are an early feeder.
- They can tend to get leggy, so netting or staking is recommended or layer them in a border.
  
- **Winter Hardiness Zone:** 6 – I have grown these for the past 3 years and they have not failed.
- **Growing Method:** Direct Sow – ¼" inch – needs darkness to germinate
- **Days to Germination:** 7-14 days at 60-65°F F
- **Recommended Seeding Window:** Late August through End of Sept
- **Sun Requirements:** Full Sun
- **Height:** 24" – 36"
- **Self Seeder:** Yes, they can be aggressive self seeders – but easy to prick out if need be.
- **Notes:** Excellent for cut flowers, and drying. Blossoms are also edible. Goes to seed easily, especially in warmer weather, so to keep blooms fresh, deadhead on the reg. Also if you Chelsea chop when they start to fade in the heat, you might get a second flush.



# Larkspur (Delphinium Consolida)

- Lovely Airy Floral spikes that can reach up to 4 feet with numerous branches. Comes in White, Pink, Purple.
- While showy, these blend beautifully within borders but can also be stunning in a giant sweep on their own.
- One of the early bloomers in a Spring Garden, Cut and Come again.
- As they start to fade in the summer heat, do a Chelsea chop and you may be a second fall flush of flowers once it cools down.
  
- **Winter Hardiness Zone: 6** – I have had seedlings overwinter for the past 3 years
- **Growing Method:** Direct Sow – lightly cover – need darkness to germ
- **Days to Germination:** 14-21 days at 55°F
- **Recommended Seeding Window:** Late August through Late Sept (they can germinate in cooler temps so you have a longer window)
- **Sun Requirements:** Full Sun
- **Height:** 36 – 48"
- **Self Seeder:** Yes
- **Notes:** Excellent in bouquets, even though very tall, I find these have strong stems and I haven't needed to stake.



# White Lace Flower (Orlaya Grandiflora)

- Delicate Lacey Umbel type blooms, blooms very early in Spring, I have had them by mid- April.
- If deadheaded on the reg, they will bloom deep into the hot summer.
- Because they are early Umbels, they are a huge treat for pollinators.
- If used in a bouquet, condition for at least three hours prior or they will be floppy
  
- **Winter Hardiness Zone: 6** – I have had seedlings overwinter for the past 3 years
- **Growing Method:** Direct Sow – do not cover
- **Days to Germination:** 12-16 days at 60-65°F
- **Recommended Seeding Window:** Late August through Late Sept (they can germinate in cooler temps)
- **Sun Requirements:** Full Sun
- **Height: 24"**
- **Self Seeder:** Yes – HELL YES. These can be thugs, so you must deadhead or you will have 1000 seedlings.
- **Notes:** I have a love/hate with these. Love the flowers, hate that they are thugs and will literally grow in gravel, you can't kill these. I have dug out 1000 seedlings over the years and the seeds are sharp and spiky and will hurt your fingers. But they are so so beautiful in landscape and in arrangements.



# Foxglove (Digitalis Purpurea)

- While old varieties of Foxglove are biennials, there are a few standout new types are First Year blooming annuals – these include Camelot and Dalmatian. Seeds provided are these types.
- I have found that even though they are first year bloomers, they are not typical annuals and you will get a second or three year before they start to peter out.
- These are excellent in the back of borders.
- This plant is a poisonous plant – all parts, so if you do grow, don't eat.
  
- **Winter Hardiness Zone: 5** – extremely cold hardy.
- **Growing Method:** Direct Sow – do not cover – Seeds are tiny, so I tend to over sow
- **Days to Germination:** 12-16 days at 60-65°F
- **Recommended Seeding Window:** Late August through Late Sept (they can germinate in cooler temps)
- **Sun Requirements:** Full Sun
- **Height:** 24" – 36"
- **Self Seeder:** Yes, can be a touch aggressive if you don't deadhead. Seedlings are easily transportable however if you want to thin/move in the Spring.
- **Notes:** The flower spikes do get heavy so netting or staking recommended.



# Poppies

(Papaver rhoeas, Papaver somniferum )

- Poppies are extremely winter hardy – some people swear by sprinkling their seeds in the snow and letting them melt into the ground.
- There are a number of types of poppies but for the cool flower method I recommend focusing on the annual types listed above.
- Some popular varieties are Amazing Grey, Lauren's Grape, Mother of Pearl and Supreme.
- Blooms only last a few days on the stem, fairly delicate. Each seed pod will contain a ton of seeds.

**Winter Hardiness Zone: 6** – I have had seedlings overwinter for the past 3 years

- **Growing Method:** Direct Sow – do not cover –however birds love these so overseed or **very** lightly cover
- **Days to Germination:** 14-21 days at 60-65°F
- **Recommended Seeding Window:** Late August through Late Sept (they can germinate in cooler temps. Or very early in spring as soon as the ground can be worked.
- **Sun Requirements:** Full Sun
- **Height:** Depends on the type
- **Self Seeder:** Yes, although I like to direct seed myself since the seeds are so small and I want to know I am putting them where I want them.
- **Notes:** Since the seeds are so small, I tend to overseed. Seed pods are great in bouquets but I find the flowers are hard to use. You can dip the stem in boiling water or burn with a lighter.



# Sweet William Catch Fly (Silene Ameria)

- Airy and delicate bright pink blooms that will bloom late April – Early May and go through July/August if you deadhead.
- They have light airy stalks and are great to weave into a border, with shorter plants.
- Once established – they are pretty drought tolerant.
- The Flowers I grow are from a MA Cemetery and were planted around the graves of three children who died in 1814 on the same day – I like to think of them as a memorial to those children.
- Stems are sticky when cut and they are great cut flowers.
  
- **Winter Hardiness Zone:** 6 – I have planted these in the fall for the past 3 years with amazing results
- **Growing Method:** Direct Sow – ¼" Deep – needs darkness to germinate
- **Days to Germination:** 7-14 days at 65-72°F
- **Recommended Seeding Window:** Late August through Late Sept (they can germinate in cooler temps)
- **Sun Requirements:** Full Sun
- **Height:** 24"
- **Self Seeder:** Yes – they can be a heavy reseeder but they are do delicate, I love having them in big clumps.
- **Notes:** The seeds are so small, I tend to over seed and thin in the spring if I need to to make sure that I get what I need



## Sweet Peas – Climbing - (Lathyrus Odoratus)

- A cottage garden favorite since the 1600's – these lovely, heavily scented climbers come in a wide variety of colors and scent levels. They are climbers and need a trellis or support. Can climb to over 10 feet high in optimal conditions.
- They are heavy feeders and want nutrition rich soil. I use Espoma Flower Tone while planting.
- Some people recommend soaking and nicking the seeds before planting – I have tried that and planted – both worked.
- Can be planted in the fall or very very early spring. Fall self seeded did the best for me. Summer heat will kill these quickly, and so will leaving them go to seed. For longest bloom time – deadhead frequently.
- **Winter Hardiness Zone: 7** – Last year was the first year a fall planting worked for me. Including them tonight because the fall self sown were the most incredible showing I have ever had.
- **Growing Method:** Direct Sow – Cover – needs dark to germinate
- **Days to Germination:** 7-10 days at 60-65°F
- **Recommended Seeding Window:** Late August through Late Sept (they can germinate in cooler temps) Second planting in Feb/March.
- **Sun Requirements:** Full Sun
- **Height:** Stems 24", vines up to 10 feet if not cut back or trained.
- **Self Seeder:** Yes – but, I like to hedge by bets and plant fresh seeds every year to be safe
- **Notes.** Because I love them SO much – I do a fall planting and a early spring (as soon as the ground can be worked) planting. I want more and more each year. Cut and come again/



# Additional Cool Flowers

BOTANICAL NAME	COMMON NAMES	WINTER HARDINESS ZONE	SEED STARTING METHOD (Preferred method listed first)
Agrostemma githago	Corn Cockle	7	Sow outdoors
Ammi majus	Bishop's Flower, Queen Anne's Lace	7	Sow indoors; sow outdoors
Ammi visnaga	Green Mist	7	Sow outdoors; sow indoors
Anchusa azurea	Dropmore, Bugloss (Blue and Italian)	3	Sow indoors; sow outdoors
Anethum graveolens	Dill	8	Sow outdoors; sow indoors
Antirrhinum majus	Snapdragons	4 – varieties may vary	Sow indoors
Brassica oleracea	Ornamental Kale	7	Sow indoors
Bupleurum griffithii	Bupleurum	5	Sow outdoors
Calendula officinalis	Pot Marigold, Calendula	7	Sow indoors; sow outdoors
Campanula medium	Canterbury Bells, Bellflower	5	Sow indoors
Centaurea cyanus	Bachelor Button, Cornflower	6	Sow outdoors
Daucus carota var. sativus	False Queen Anne's Lace	7	Sow indoors; sow outdoors
Delphinium	Delphinium	3	Sow indoors
Delphinium consolida	Larkspur	6	Sow outdoors
Dianthus barbatus	Sweet William	5	Sow indoors
Digitalis purpurea	Foxglove, Lady's Glove	5	Sow indoors; sow outdoors
Eustoma	Lisianthus	7	Sow indoors
Godetia	Godetia, Farewell-to-Spring	8	Sow indoors; sow outdoors
Helichrysum bracteatum	Strawflower	8	Sow indoors; sow outdoors
Lathyrus odoratus	Sweet Peas	7	Sow indoors; sow outdoors
Moluccella laevis	Bells of Ireland	7	Sow outdoors; sow indoors
Monarda hybrida	Lambada	7	Sow indoors; sow outdoors
Nigella	Love-in-a-Mist	6	Sow outdoors
Orlaya grandiflora	White Lace Flower	6	Sow indoors; sow outdoors
Papaver nudicaule	Iceland Poppy	6	Sow outdoors
Rudbeckia hirta	Black-Eyed Susan	5	Sow indoors; sow outdoors
Scabiosa atropurpurea	Pincushion Flower	7	Sow indoors; sow outdoors
Tanacetum parthenium	Feverfew	5	Sow indoors; sow outdoors
Trachelium caeruleum	Throatwort	7	Sow indoors
Viola x wittrockiana	Pansy	7	Sow indoors



Lisa Mason Ziegler:

**Book**

Cool Flowers

**Website:** <https://thegardenersworkshop.com/>

**Podcast:** Field and Garden with Lisa Mason Ziegler

**Seed Resources:**

Geoseed.com

Johnnyseeds.com

Botanicalinterests.com

# Resources



# THANK YOU

Presentation will be posted on the club website as a downloadable PDF in the next few days.