



Plant Windflowers now for a Spring Treat

By Dawn Pettinelli, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

Grecian windflowers (*Anemone blanda*) are a little known treasure with delightful daisy-like flowers heralding the arrival of spring. They are native from southeastern Europe to western Turkey. Their genus name comes from the Greek word for wind, 'anemos' likely because their graceful flowers are held on wiry stems that sway with the breeze.

Windflower 'bulbs', which are actually small tuberous roots, are generally available at garden centers now along with an assortment of other minor bulbs such as crocuses and scilla. Like many of these minor bulbs, windflowers are great for naturalizing. They are relatively inexpensive so splurge on a few dozen to plant in a spot receiving full sun to part shade where their cheery flowers will be appreciated next April. This may be in rock gardens, under spring flowering trees, in perennial gardens or a woodland area. Consider windflowers also as an underplanting for early spring flowering tulips.

Blossoms burst forth in shades of blue, purple, pinks and white, each with a sunny yellow center. They are held 6 to 9 inches high, just above the finely cut, somewhat ferny looking foliage. Windflowers are hardy to USDA zone 5 and are not especially appealing to either deer or voles. They are very attractive; however, to bees and other pollinators.

Like almost all bulbs, windflowers favor well-drained soils that contain moderate amounts of organic matter. They are happy if the soil pH is in the 6's and the site is moderately fertile. Add limestone and fertilizer, if necessary, to the garden bed before planting. Incorporate into the top 6 inches or so of soil.

The small tuberous roots are blackish, rather hard, and knobby looking. Check to make sure they are firm before purchasing. Bulb catalogs recommend soaking them in room temperature water first for up to 8 hours before planting. Place them 2 to 4 inches deep and about 3 to 4 inches apart. An inch or two of mulch will moderate soil temperatures and decrease chances of frost heaving if we experience fluctuating temperatures through the winter months.

Wait until cool temperatures persist, usually mid to late October before planting as they might sprout top growth if planted when the soil and weather is still warm. Over the long term, this does not hurt the bulb, but one would rather have energy directed into root growth rather than top growth in the fall. Fewer flowers may be noticed the following spring. Reduced bloom can also occur if bulbs are planted too late and there is not enough time for good root establishment. Check the weather forecast. When nights routinely fall into the 40s, it is time to plant.

Heirloom gardeners will be delighted to know that at least two older cultivars are still available from John Scheepers (www.johnscheepers.com) and other mail order sources. Anemones 'White Splendour' and 'Blue Shades' were first introduced in 1854 and remain popular even in today's gardens.

Like all bulbs, the foliage will slowly turn yellow after blossoms fade. Leave it alone until it browns when the dead foliage can then be removed. After a few years if the number of flowers starts to decrease, it may indicate that plants are in need of thinning. The bulbs can be dug up as the leaves start to yellow, thinned and replanted.

Windflowers can be easily forced into bloom for a bit of color during the dark days of winter. Pot up some extra bulbs this month using a moderately moistened soilless media. To precool bulbs, place the pots in a 38 to 45 degrees F, dark spot for 6 to 8 weeks. Sheds or garages often suit this purpose. Buckets can be placed over pots to block the light. Check weekly to ensure the potting mix has not dried out. Around mid-December, pots can be slowly moved indoors to slightly brighter and slightly warmer spots, eventually placed in full sun. Plants should bloom about 4 weeks later in mid to late January just when some cheery daisy-like flowers will be a welcome sight.

For information about windflowers or other spring flowering bulbs or queries on other gardening topics, feel free to contact us, toll-free, at the UConn Home & Garden Education Center at (877) 486-6271, visit our website at www.ladybug.uconn.edu or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.

