

Top 50 Rockery & Alpine Plants for Pollinators

Ground cover & Rock Garden plants you can grow in the UK
to help our pollinating insects

List Curated by Thomas McBride

From research data collected and collated at the
National Botanic Garden of Wales

NB: Butterflies and Moths are not studied at the NBGW so any data on nectar plants
beneficial for them is taken from Butterfly Conservation



Introduction



Rockery and Alpine plants are characterised by being low-growing, often mat-forming, plants. To avoid plants such as these from being overtaken or hidden by larger perennials in the border, gardeners often create a rockery garden. Alpine plants, strictly, are those which come from the Alps mountain range in Western Europe or, slightly less strictly, are those plants which grow in similar climatic conditions to the Alps such as natives of the Atlas Mountains in North Africa or the Southern Alps in New Zealand. Alpine plants are low growing in order to avoid being uprooted by the frequent high winds and adverse weather conditions that typify high altitude locations. However, for the same reason, they are also sun-lovers as there are rarely trees and large structures to cause shade at such heights. Alpine gardens, therefore, ought to be in a sunny location. Rockery plants in general may be alpine or may be native to lower altitude locations and simply be naturally low-growing. Some of these plants require slightly different conditions or may tolerate higher shade such as Heucheras or even prefer it such as Hepaticas.



Creating a Rockery or Alpine Garden

When creating a rockery or alpine garden, it is important to have in mind the wild locations of these plants. An alpine garden should preferably be placed in a south facing position. Alpines enjoy growing out of rock crevasses as it gives their roots stability and keeps them cool while the remainder of the plant is in the full sun. This is part of the reason why alpines are great plants for a rockery. The rocks you use can be small, in the form of gravel, or very large; depending on the aesthetic you are aiming for and the plants you choose.



The selection of plants chosen are generally fully hardy outdoors and should grow well in most UK climates. Some, such as the heathers, will only grow in slightly acidic soils so you may wish to test your pH before planting or add ericaceous compost to your soil. Some alpine gardens are kept in non-heated glasshouses so the sun is amplified and the ambient temperature is a little higher. While this is an excellent idea for creating a great abundance of flowers, it is important to keep in mind our pollinating insects. We recommended that you plant your garden outdoors to be most beneficial to the insects.

Guide to using these pages:

Map

Maps depict the native area of the plant (in green)
They also show areas the plant is naturalised (in purple)

All maps shown are derived from 'Plants of the World Online'; courtesy of Kew Gardens

Flowering Period (this is when it is good for pollinators!)

Plant Family

Growing habit and mature size of the plant

Latin Binomial Name

Thymus pulegioides

Common English Name

Lemon Thyme



Photograph of the plant in flower



Insect groups known to favour the nectar of this plant

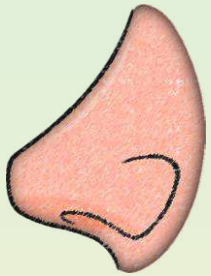


Useful knowledge or warnings about the plant

RHS AGM cultivars of this species (or a related species occasionally)

Key to these Pages

Additional information on these garden plants



The flowers and/or leaves have a Pleasant scent

This plant would be suitable for meadow-style planting



Plant is often used in traditional Herbal Remedies



The plant has edible parts that are commonly eaten or used in cooking



Warnings



Plant tissue is highly toxic if ingested



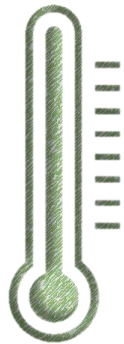
Sap may cause irritation (Wash hands after touching or avoid touching)

Temperature

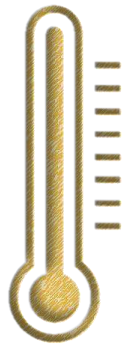
Some of the plants listed in our Top 200 are not fully hardy in all or some parts of the United Kingdom.

Plants without a thermometer symbol are fully hardy in the severest UK Winter; equating to **H5** or hardier.

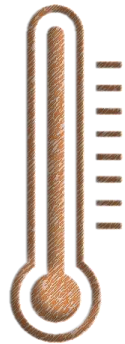
Plants with a coloured thermometer symbol are hardy to varying degrees as follows:



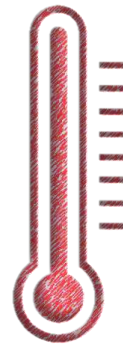
Almost Hardy
(H4)



Half-Hardy
(H3)



Not Frost Hardy
(H2)



Not Hardy
(H1)

RHS Hardiness Scale

H1a	-	Above 15°C
H1b	-	Minimum 10°C
H1c	-	Minimum 5°C
H2	-	Minimum 1°C
H3	-	Minimum -5°C
H4	-	Minimum -10°C
H5	-	Minimum -15°C

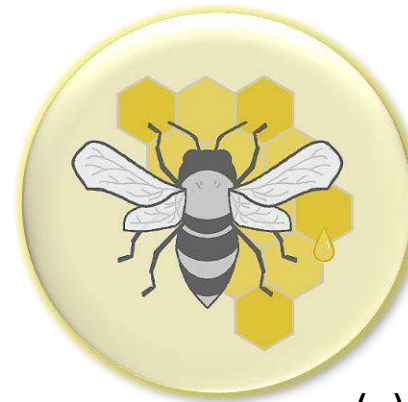
Pollinators

Our data on pollinators has been collected from studies spanning over a decade. Pollinator symbols appear when plants are proven to be good nectar plants for certain insects.

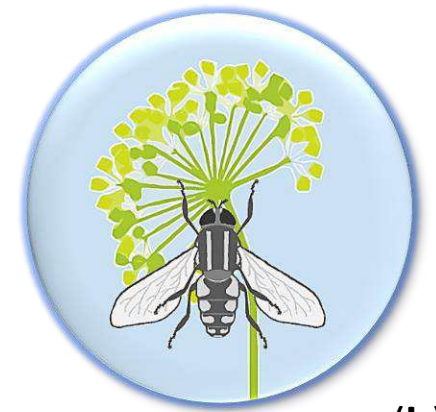
It should be noted that all bee and hoverfly data is ours but lepidoptera data is taken from Butterfly Conservation.

Our data spans a wide range of different insect species. For simplicity, these species have been condensed into six easy icons to represent them:

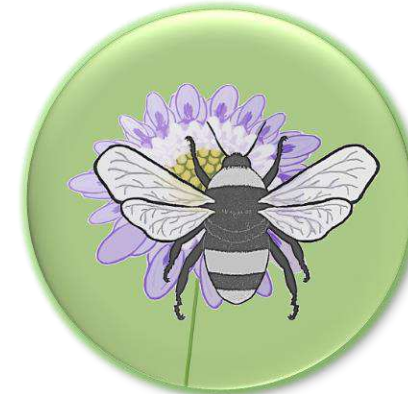
- | | | |
|---------------|------------------------------------|------------------|
| a) Honeybees | c) Bumblebees | e) Moths |
| b) Hoverflies | d) Butterflies
(Includes Moths) | f) Solitary Bees |



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)



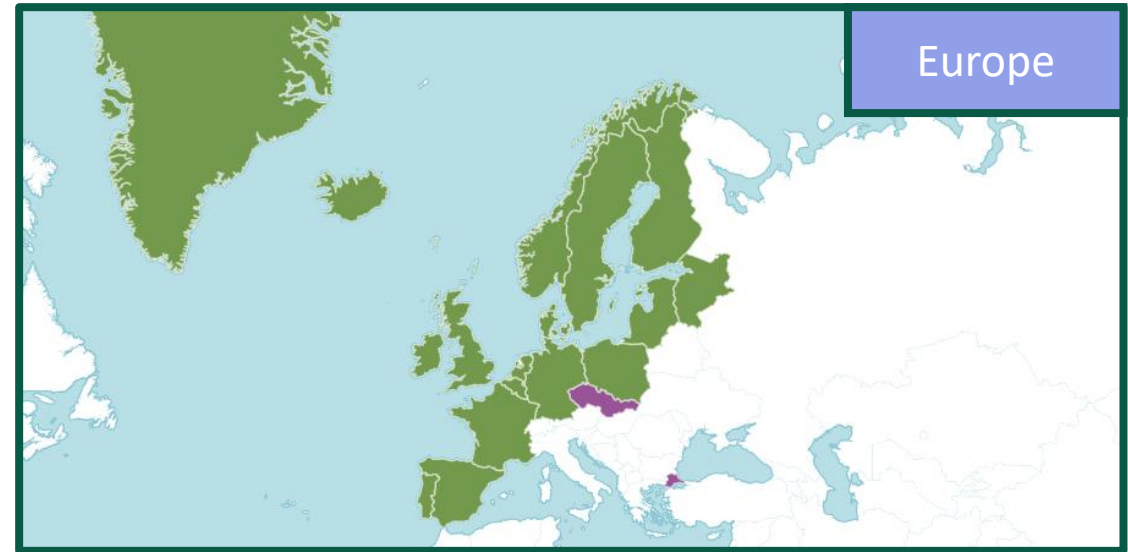
(e)



(f)

Armeria maritima

Common Thrift



Europe



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Derek Winterburn

'Vindictive'



Late Spring
- Midsummer

Plumbaginaceae
Leadwort Family

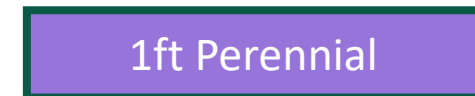
1ft Perennial

Aster alpinus

Blue Alpine Daisy



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Ettore Balocchi



Aubrieta deltoidea

Purple Rock-cress



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Adreia



'Doctor Mules'
'Red Cascade'



Spring 

Brassicaceae
Mustard Family

Trailing Perennial

Calluna vulgaris

Common Heather



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Andreas Rockstein

'Dark Beauty'
'Spring Cream'



Early Summer
- Early Autumn

Ericaceae
Heather Family

Small Subshrub

Campanula cochleariifolia

Fairies' Thimbles



Photograph from Wikipedia (CC) Jerzy Opiola



'Elizabeth Oliver'
-Species-



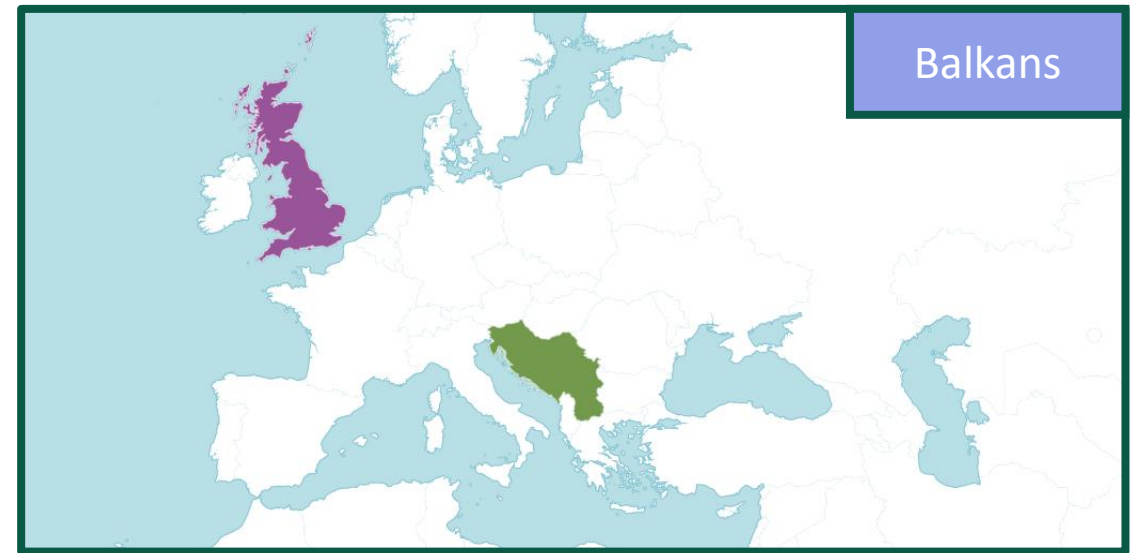
Summer ☀

Campanulaceae
Bellflower Family

Alpine Perennial

Campanula poscharskyana

Serbian Bellflower



Early Summer
- Early Autumn

Campanulaceae
Bellflower Family

2ft Perennial

Campanula rotundifolia

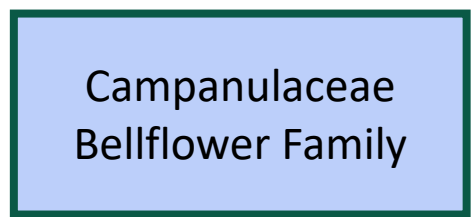
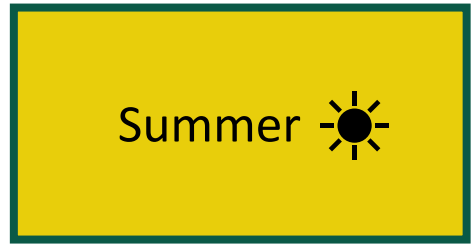
Common Harebell



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Andreas Rockstein

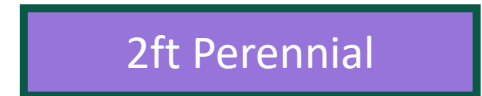
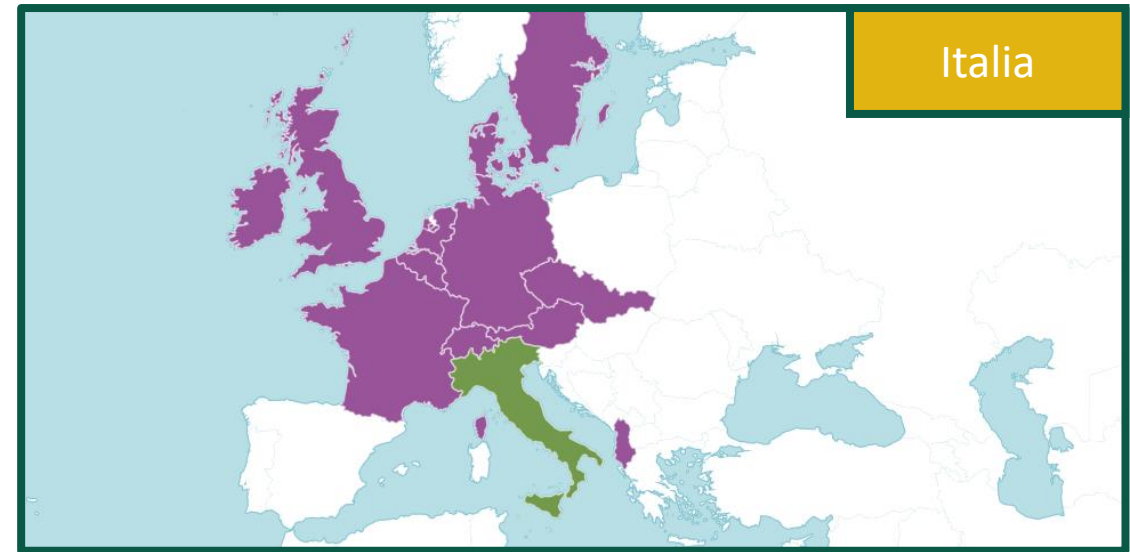


None



Cerastium tomentosum

Snow-in-Summer



Ceratostigma plumbaginoides

Hardy Blue Leadwort



Photograph from Wikipedia (CC) David J Stang



-Species-

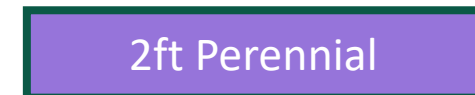
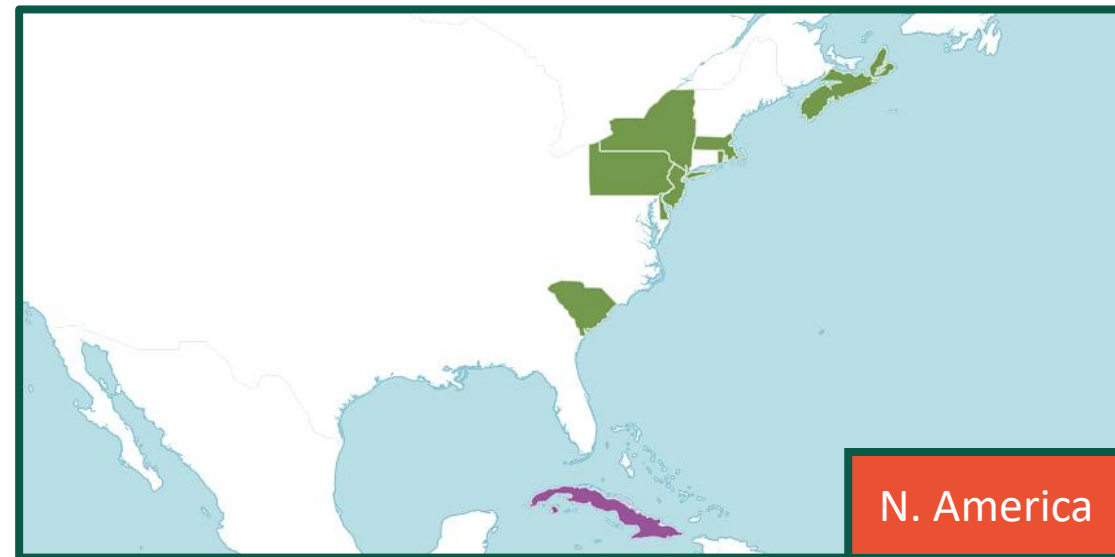
Midsummer
- Early Autumn

Plumbaginaceae
Leadwort Family

2ft Perennial

Coreopsis rosea

Pink Tickseed



Corydalis flexuosa

Chinese Blue Corydalis



'Blue Panda'
'Purple Leaf'



Spring 

Papaveraceae
Poppy Family

2ft Perennial

Crocus chrysanthus

Golden Crocus



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Andreas Rockstein



Crocus vernus

Spring Crocus



Daboecia cantabrica

St. Dabeoc's Heather



Early Summer
- Mid Autumn

Ericaceae
Heather Family

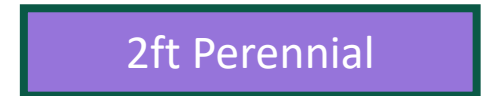
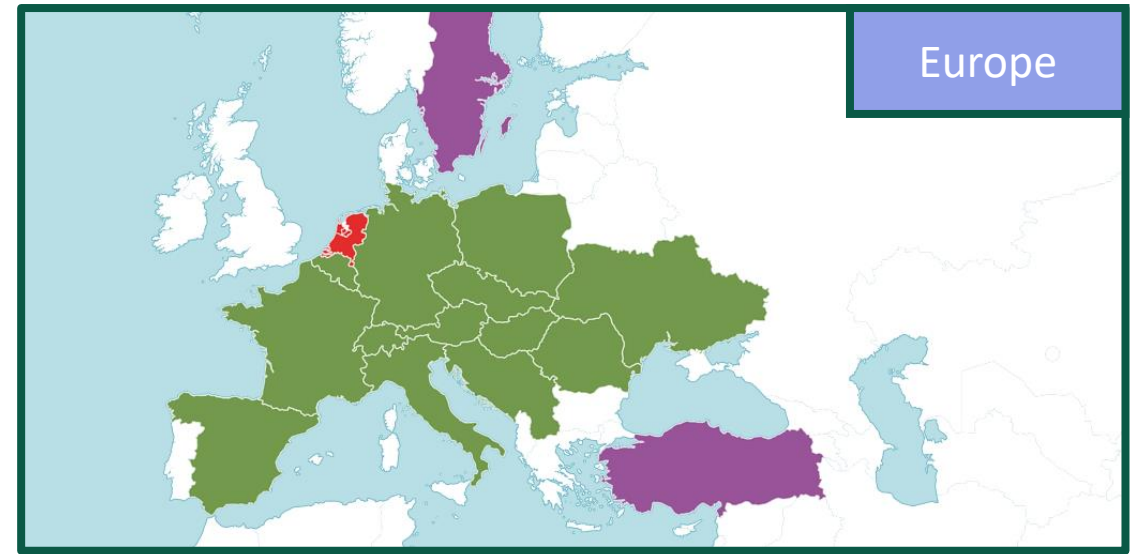
Small Subshrub

Dianthus carthusianorum

Carthusian Pink



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Xulisc G



Dianthus caryophyllus

Carnation, Clove Pink

Photograph of Cultivar from
Flickr (CC) Lawrence Chernin



Photograph from Wikipedia (CC) H. Brisse



Many Cultivars

Always Choose Single-flowering Cultivars



Summer ☀

Caryophyllaceae
Pink Family

1ft Perennial

Draba longisiliqua

Long-Podded Whitlow Grass



- Species -



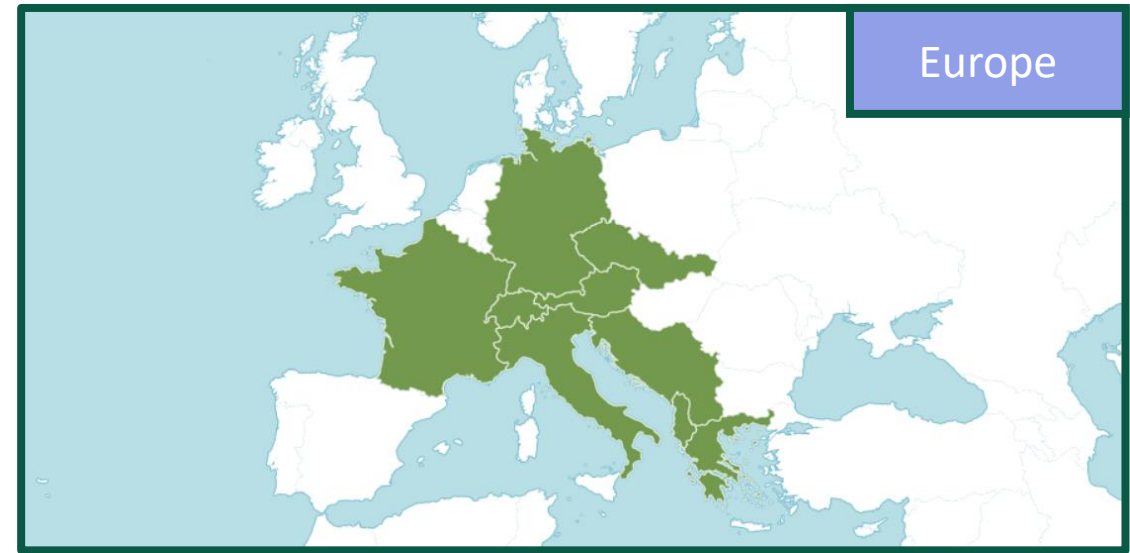
Spring 

Brassicaceae
Mustard Family

1ft Spreading Perennial

Erica carnea

Winter Heather



‘Eva’ ‘Vivellii’
‘Winter Snow’



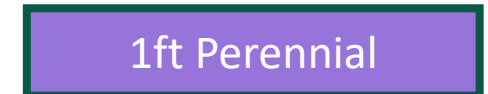
Mid Winter
- Early Spring

Ericaceae
Heather Family

Small Subshrub

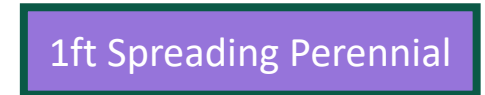
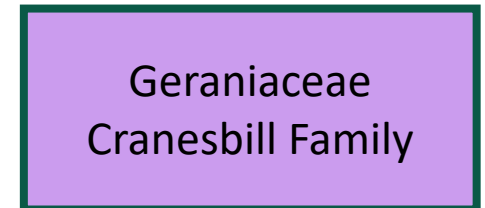
Erigeron karvinskianus

Mexican Fleabane



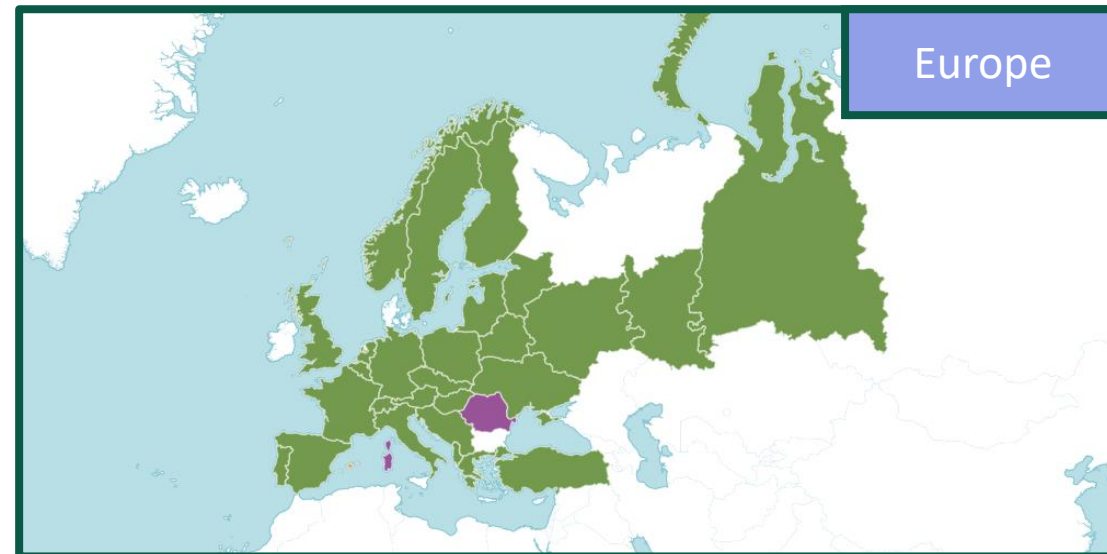
Erodium reichardii

Balearic Storksbill



Euphorbia cyparissias

Cypress Spurge



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Andreas Rockstein



Related species:

'Abbey Dore'

Mid Spring
- Early Summer

Euphorbiaceae
Spurge Family

2ft Perennial

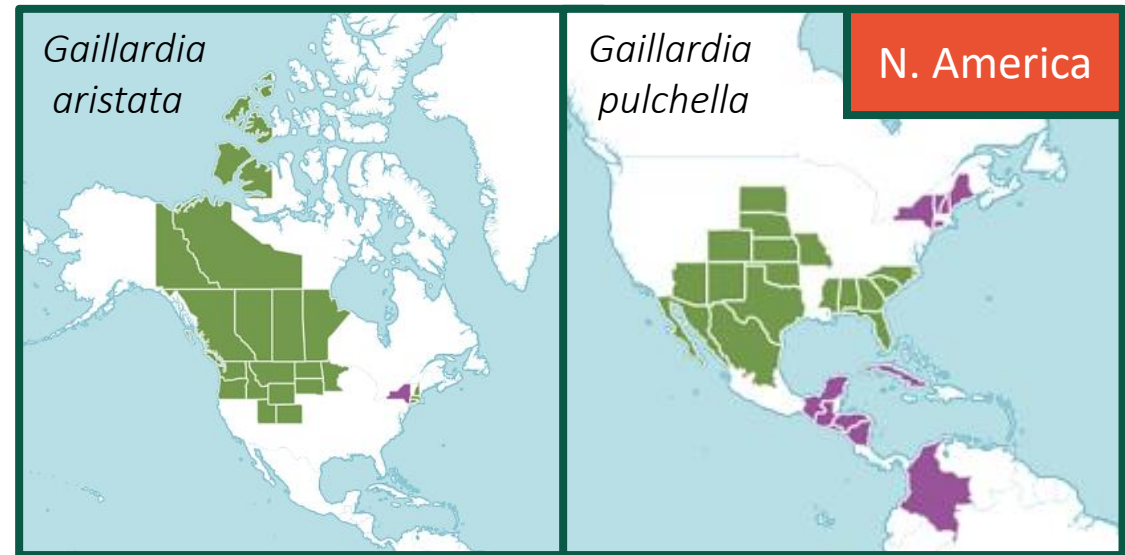
Gaillardia x grandiflora

Hybrid Blanketflower

Gaillardia pulchella x *Gaillardia aristata*



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Swallowtail Garden Seeds



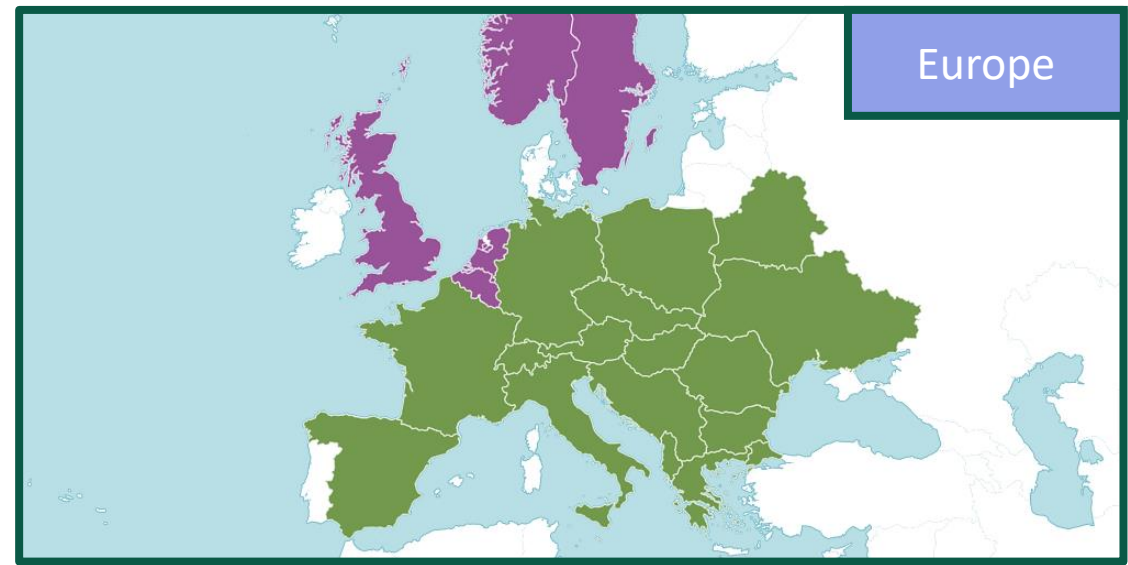
Late Summer
- Mid Autumn

Asteraceae
Daisy Family

2ft Perennial

Galanthus nivalis

Common Snowdrop



'Viridapice'
-Species-



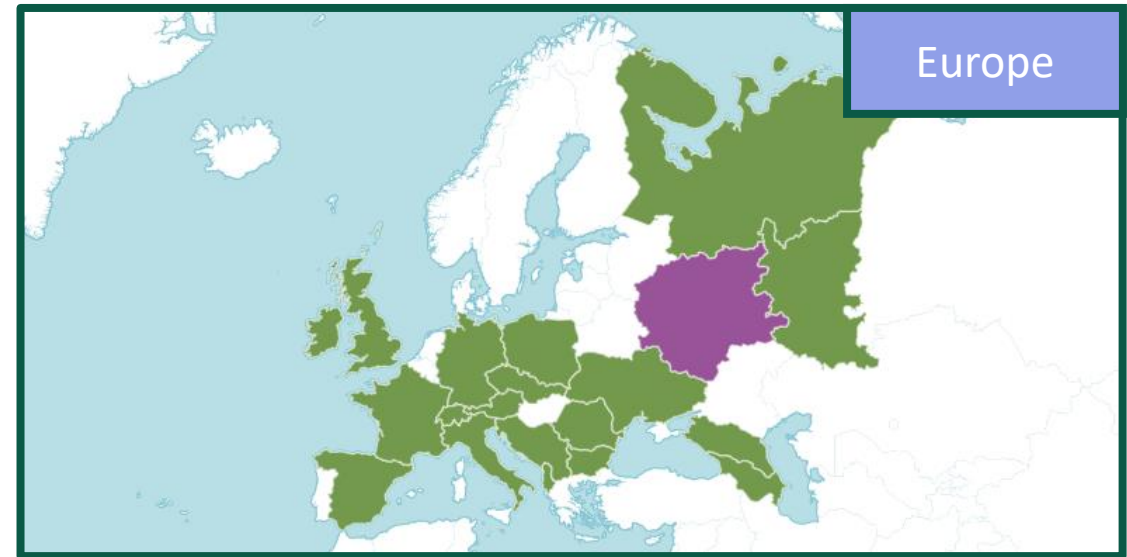
Winter ❄️

Amaryllidaceae
Daffodil Family

1ft Bulbous

Gentiana verna

Spring Gentian



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Xulese G

'Angulosa'



Late Spring
- Early Summer

Gentianaceae
Gentian Family

Alpine Perennial

Geranium sanguineum

Bloody Cranesbill



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Hornbeam Arts

'Ankum's Pride'
'Shepherd's Warning'



Summer ☀

Geraniaceae
Cranesbill Family

2ft Perennial

Helianthemum appeninum

White Rock-rose



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Bernard du Pont



Late Spring
- Midsummer

Cistaceae
Rock-rose Family

Small Trailing Shrub

Helianthemum nummularium

Common Rock-rose



Hepatica nobilis

Common Liverleaf



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Priit Tammet



- Species -



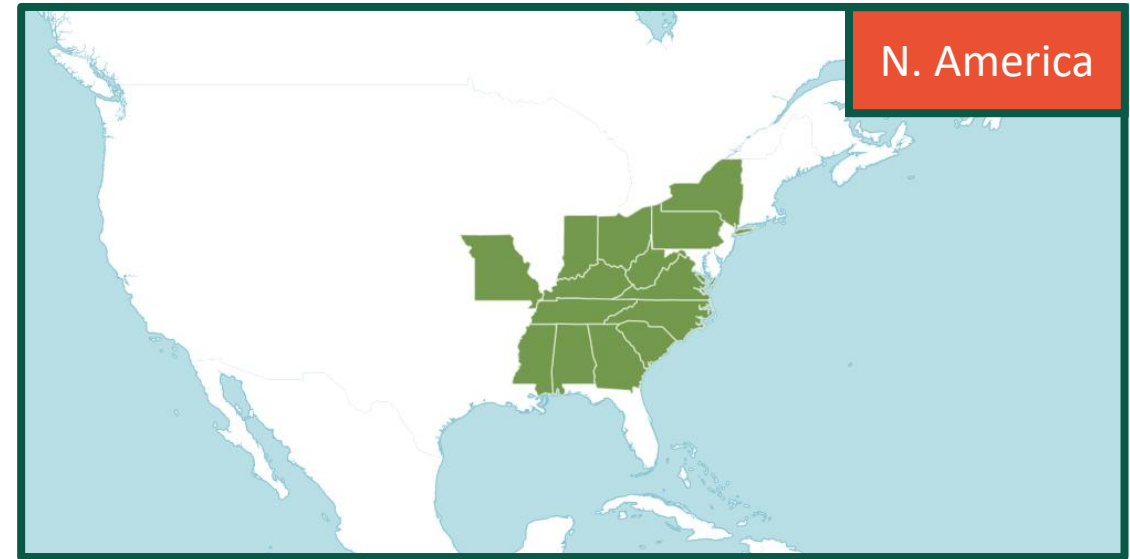
Spring 

Ranunculaceae
Buttercup Family

1ft Rhizomous

Heuchera villosa

Coral Bells



'Cherry Cola'
'Lime Marmalade'

RHS AWARD OF GARDEN MERIT

Summer ☀

Saxifragaceae
Saxifrage Family

2ft Perennial

Hylotelephium caudicola

Cliff Stonecrop



Photograph from Flickr (CC) David Short



Japan

'Lidakense'
-Species-



Late Summer
- Mid Autumn

Crassulaceae
Stonecrop Family

1ft Perennial

Hypericum olympicum

Mt. Olympus St John's Wort



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Yew Chan



'Citrinum'
- Species -



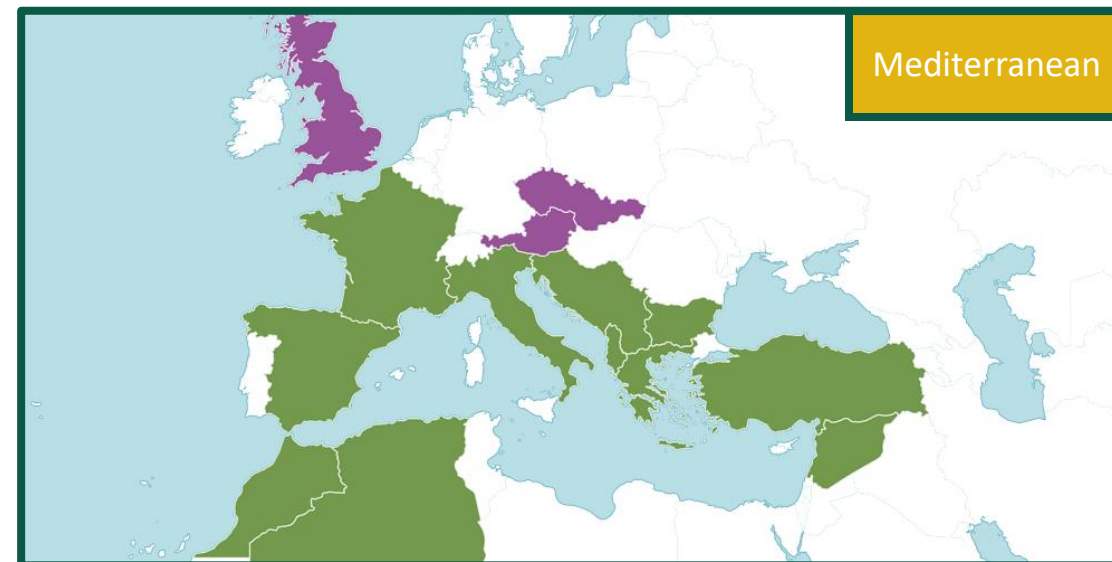
Summer ☀

Hypericaceae
St Johns Wort Family

Small Sub-shrub

Iberis sempervirens

Perennial Candytuft



'Snowflake'



Late Spring
- Midsummer

Brassicaceae
Mustard Family

1ft Perennial

Limnanthes douglasii

Poached Egg Plant



Photograph from Flickr (CC) James Gaither



Midsummer
- Early Autumn

Limnanthaceae
Meadowfoam Family

1ft Annual

Lithodora diffusa

Purple Gromwell



'Grace Ward'
'Heavenly Blue'



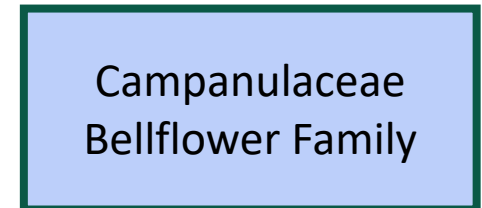
Late Spring
- Midsummer

Boraginaceae
Borage Family

Small Spreading Shrub

Lobelia erinus

Garden Lobelia

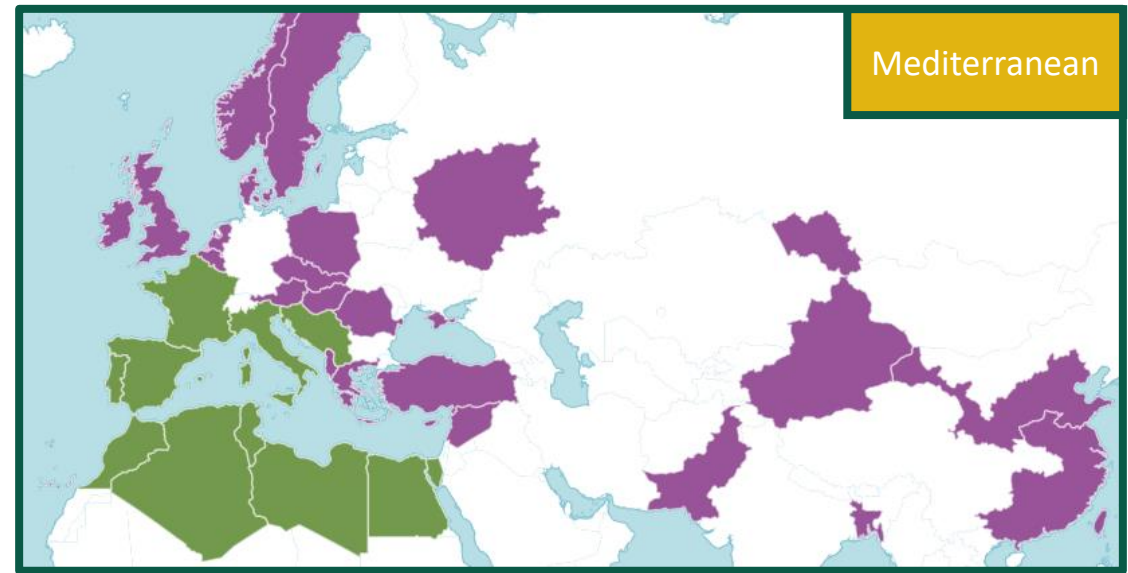


Lobularia maritima

Sweet Alyssum



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Sampo Pihlainen



Lysimachia monelli

Blue Pimpernel



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Gertjan van Noord



'Gentian Blue'
- Species -



The logo for the RHS Award of Garden Merit, featuring a green trophy cup inside a circular border with the text "RHS AWARD OF GARDEN MERIT" and a registered trademark symbol. To the right of the logo is a stylized white tree icon.

Summer ☀

Primulaceae
Primrose Family

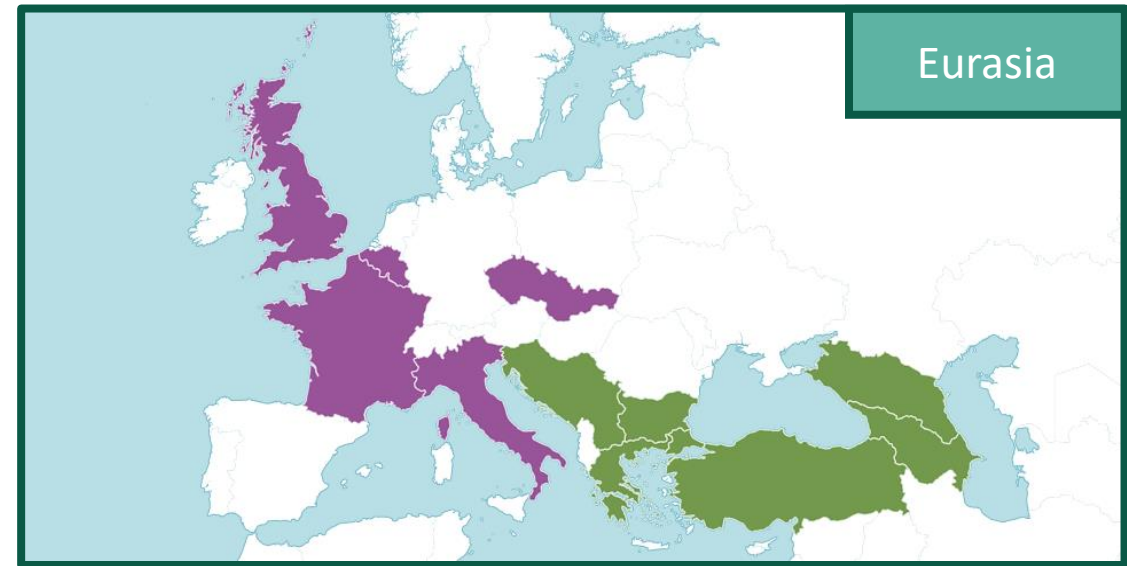
1ft Creeping Annual

Muscari armeniacum

Garden Grape-Hyacinth



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Yves Merck



'Christmas Pearl'
- Species -



Early Winter
- Mid Spring

Asparagaceae
Asparagus Family

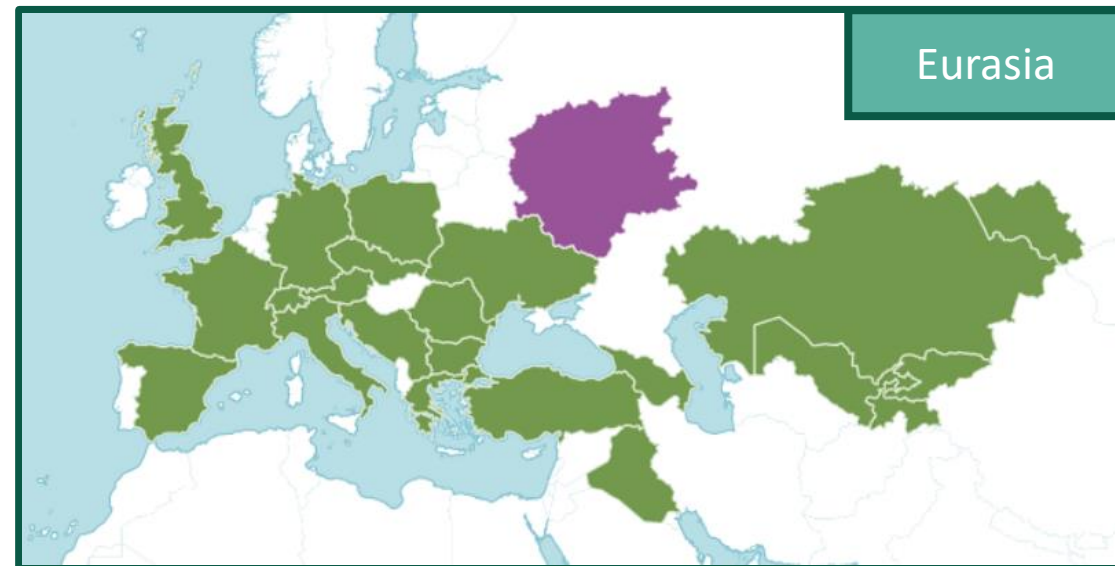
1ft Bulbous

Myosotis alpestris

Alpine Forget-me-not



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Marco Bernardini



Oxalis adenophylla

Chilean Sour-clover



- Species -



Late Spring
- Early Summer

Oxalidaceae
Wood-sorrel Family

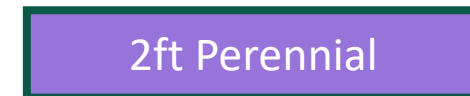
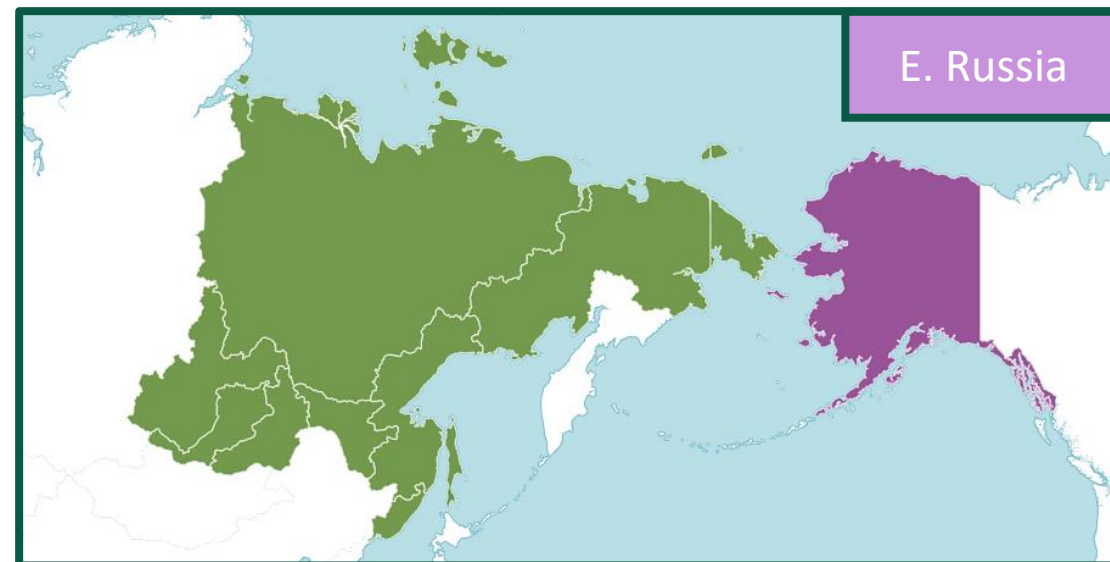
1ft Bulbous

Papaver nudicaule

Icelandic Poppy

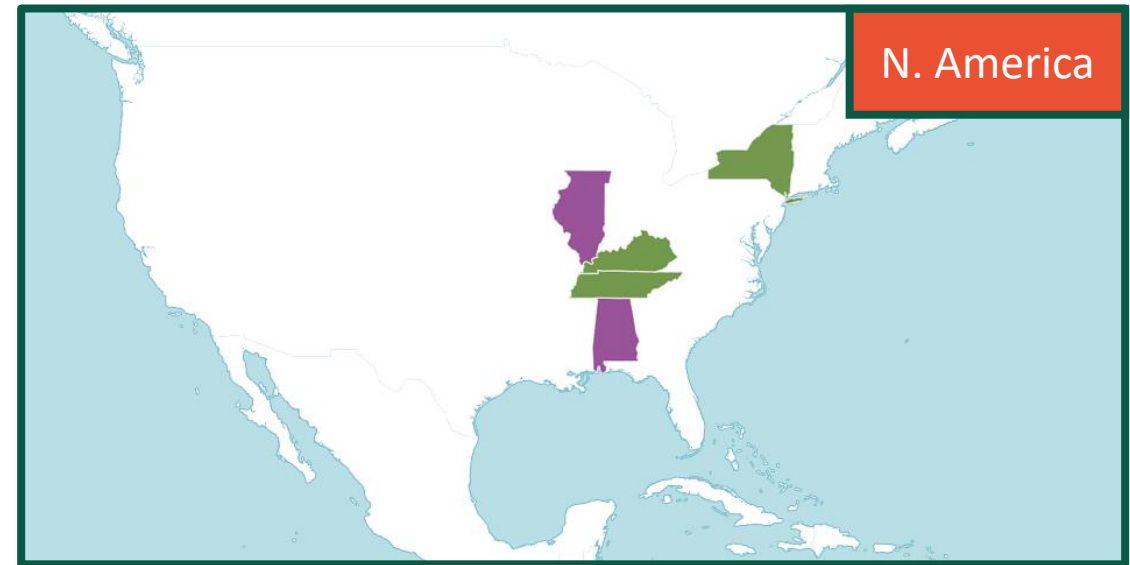


Photograph from Flickr (CC) M's Photography



Phlox subulata

Creeping Phlox



‘Red Wings’
‘McDaniel's Cushion’



Late Spring
- Early Summer

Polemoniaceae
Jacob's Ladder Family

1ft Spreading Perennial

Pulsatilla vulgaris


Common Pasqueflower



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Rainer Stropek

- Species -

The logo for the RHS Award of Garden Merit, featuring a green trophy cup inside a circular border with the text "RHS AWARD OF GARDEN MERIT" and a stylized tree to the right.

Spring 

Ranunculaceae
Buttercup Family

Alpine Perennial

Ranunculus calandrinioides

High Alpine Buttercup



- Species -

Winter ❄️

Ranunculaceae
Buttercup Family

1ft Perennial



Saxifraga paniculata

Alpine Saxifrage



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Xulesc G



'Lagroveana'
'Rosea' 'Venetia'

The RHS Award of Garden Merit logo, which consists of a circular emblem with a trophy cup in the center and the text 'RHS AWARD OF GARDEN MERIT' around the perimeter. To the right of the emblem is a stylized tree icon.

Summer ☀

Saxifragaceae
Saxifrage Family

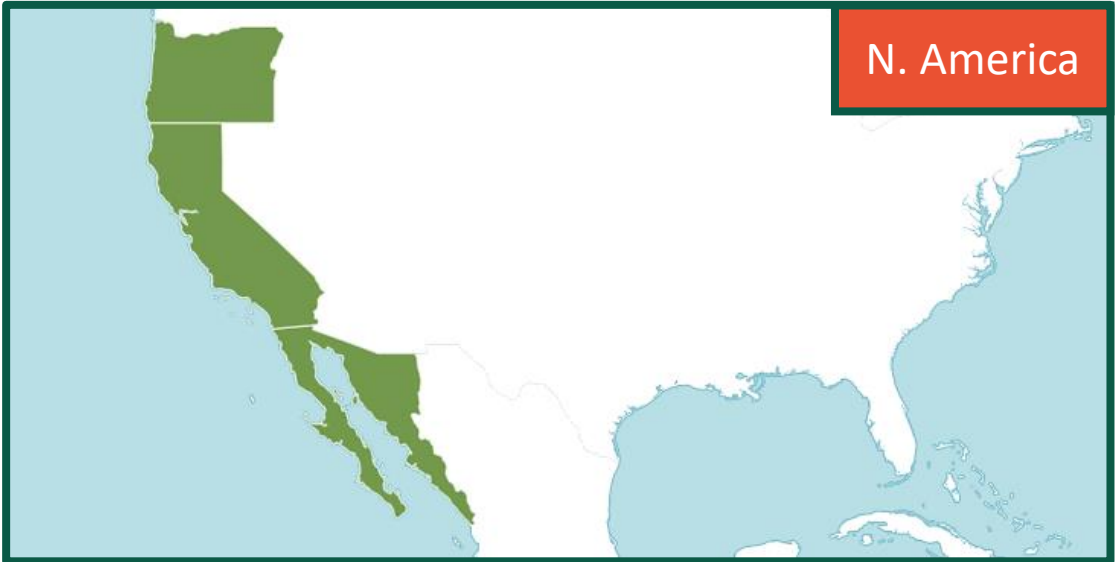
1ft Perennial

Sisyrinchium bellum

Californian Blue-eyed Grass



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Cliff Hutson



None



The logo for the RHS Award of Garden Merit, featuring a green circular emblem with a white trophy in the center. The text "RHS AWARD OF GARDEN MERIT" is written around the perimeter of the circle, and a registered trademark symbol (®) is at the bottom right. To the right of the emblem is a stylized white tree icon.

Mid Spring
- Early Summer

Iridaceae
Iris Family

2ft Perennial

Thymus pulegioides

Lemon Thyme

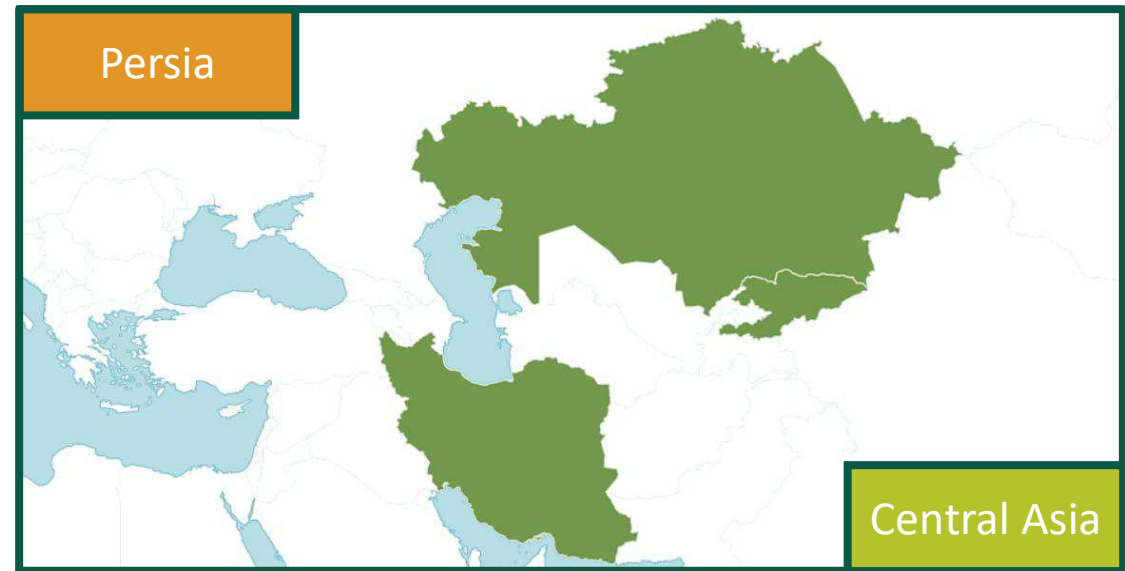


Photograph from Flickr (CC) Andreas Rockstein



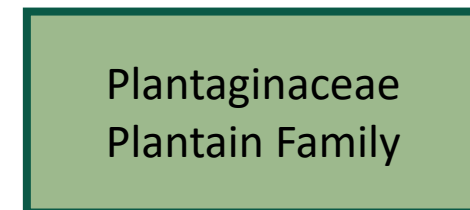
Tulipa urumiensis

Late Tulip



Veronica gentianoides

Gentian Speedwell



Veronica prostrata

Rock Speedwell



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Hans Hillewaert



- Species -
'Spode Blue'



Late Summer
- Mid Autumn

Plantaginaceae
Plantain Family

1ft Spreading Perennial