



Top 50 Edible Plants for Pollinators

A selection of the best fruit trees, flowering vegetables and herbs to grow for food while attracting pollinators

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



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

Phaseolus coccineus

Common English Name

Runner Bean

Photograph of the plant in flower



Insect groups known to favour the nectar of this plant



'Achievement' 'Celebration'

Summer ☀️

Fabaceae Legume Family

8ft Climber Perennial

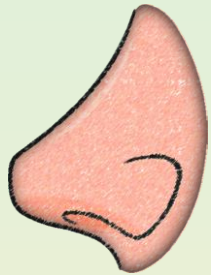
* Will not survive a frost, only half-hardy 11A

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 only 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

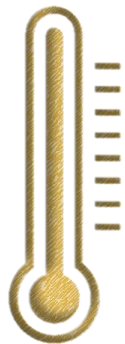
Some of the plants listed in our Top 200 are not fully hardy in all or some parts of the United Kingdom.

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:



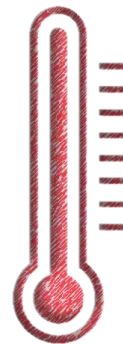
Almost Hardy
(H4)



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

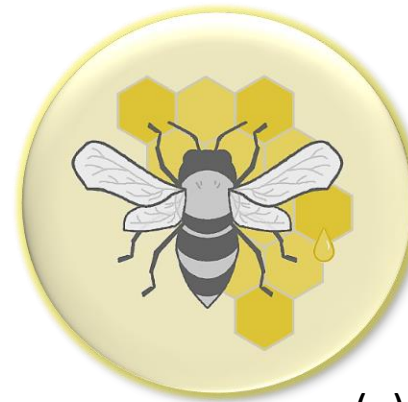
Pollinators

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)

Fruiting Trees, Shrubs & Perennials

Fruit Trees and Shrubs are amongst the best plants for pollinators. Orchard trees such as apple, pear and plum trees have abundant flowers in the spring which are incredibly important for honeybees and many solitary bees to establish their nests or colonies for the year. Shrubs too, such as brambles in particular, provide a very important source of nectar through the summer. Brambles will spread but, in a larger garden, they can be contained in hedgerow areas; providing an excellent source of nectar to all pollinating insects.



As well as plants from the Rosaceae, there are a number of other important fruits on this list. Fruiting vegetables, which botanically are fruit, such as courgettes, beans and pumpkins can be very popular with bumblebees in particular. If you do not have the time to plant large fruit trees and wait for them to grow, fruiting shrubs can be just as beneficial. Try blueberry bushes if you have acidic soil or citrus bushes in pots if you have a warm place to keep them over the winter period. For a more unusual fruit selection, why not try the fruits of the Amelanchier tree or the Strawberry-tree. Fruiting plants for pollinators are the best group to plant as picking the fruits will not reduce the flowering capacity of the plant; they are designed to have their fruits eaten as it is part of the natural process of seed dispersal.

Actinidia chinensis

Golden Kiwi



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Manuel M. V. & Ting Chen (Flower)



- None -

Spring

Actinidiaceae
Kiwi Family

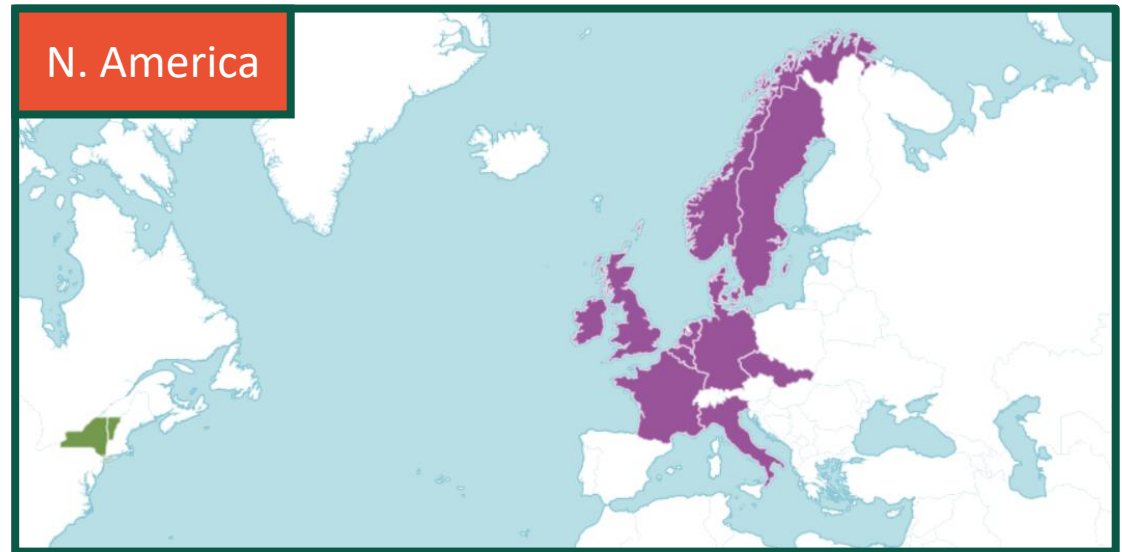
10ft+ Climber

Amelanchier lamarckii

Snowy Mespilus



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Ekenitr



- Species -



Spring 

Rosaceae
Rose Family

Small Tree

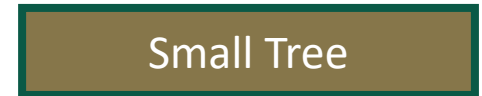
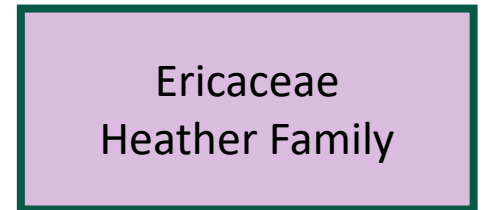
Arbutus unedo Strawberry Tree



Photograph from Wikipedia (CC) Umberto Ferrando, Markus Nolf (fruit)



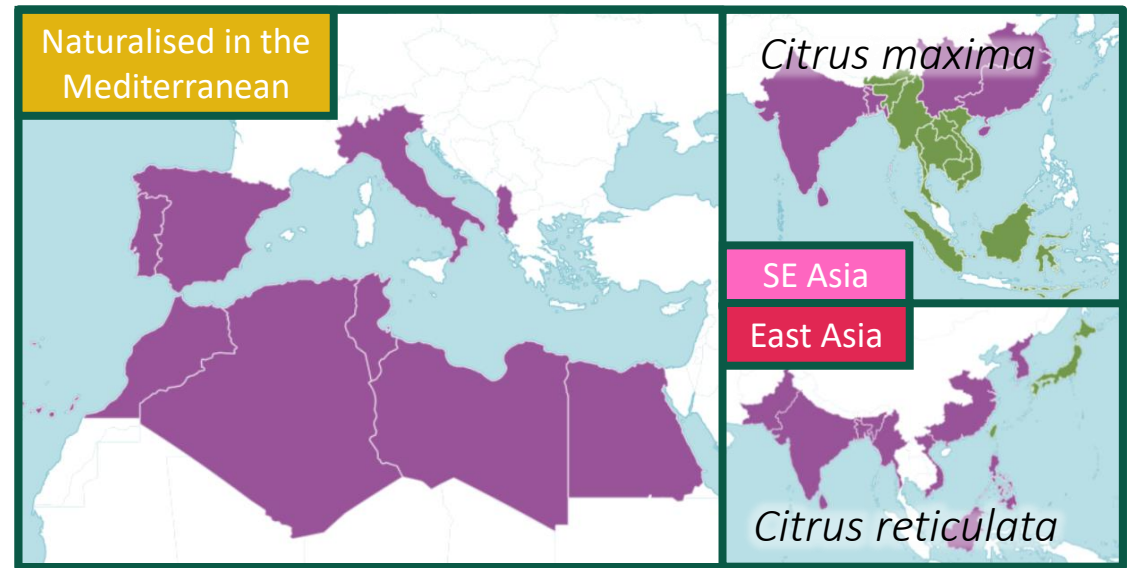
'Atlantic'
f. rubra



Citrus x aurantium

Bitter Orange, Seville Orange

Citrus maxima x *Citrus reticulata*



None

RHS AWARD OF GARDEN MERIT

Late Spring
- Midsummer

Rutaceae
Rue Family

Small Tree

* This plant should be kept under glass during the winter
(cannot survive below -5°C night temperatures)

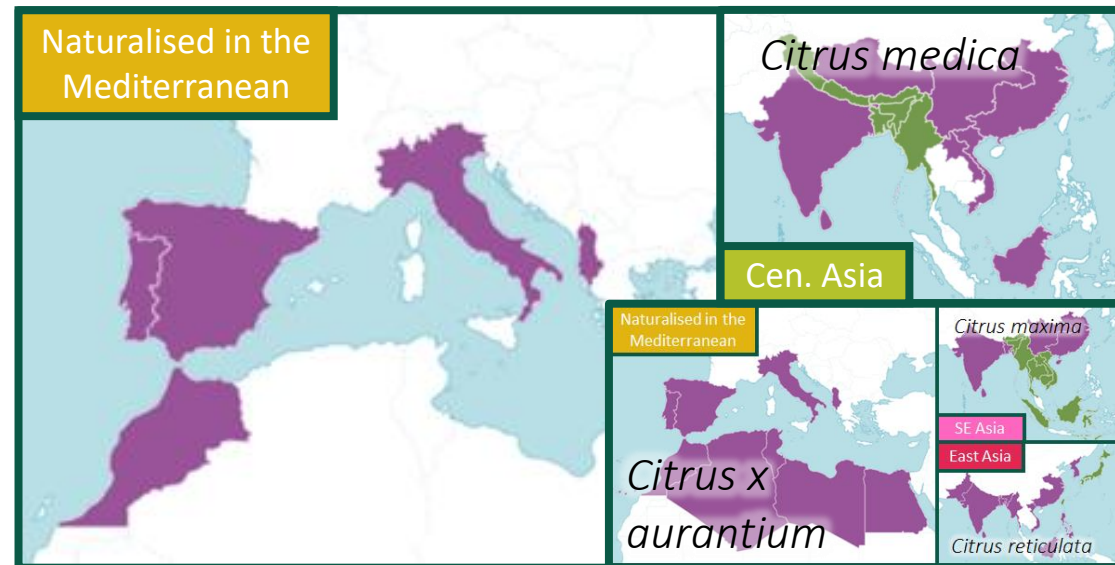
Citrus x limon

Lemon

Citrus x aurantium x *Citrus medica*



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Jesus Cabrera



'Meyer'
'Variegata'



Late Spring
- Midsummer

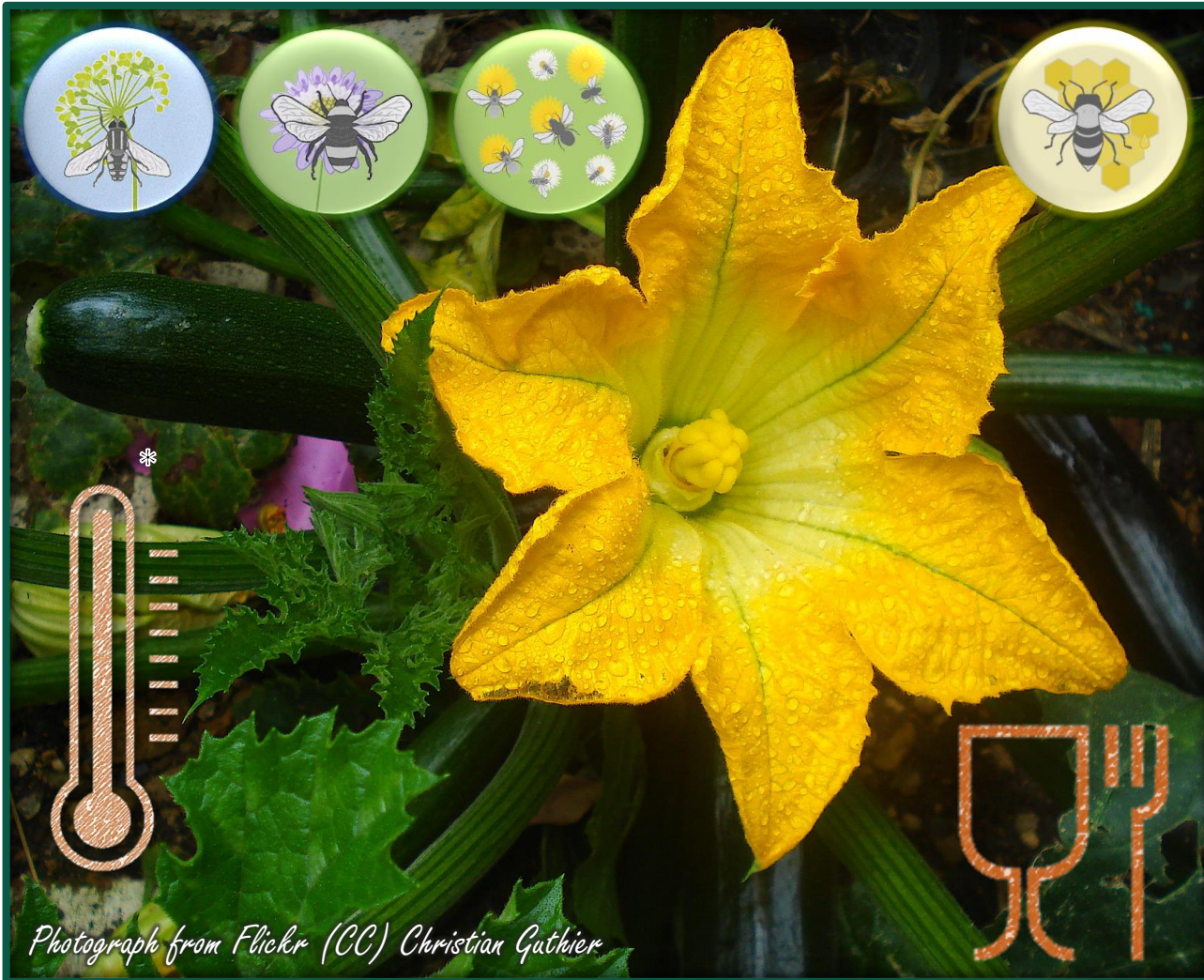
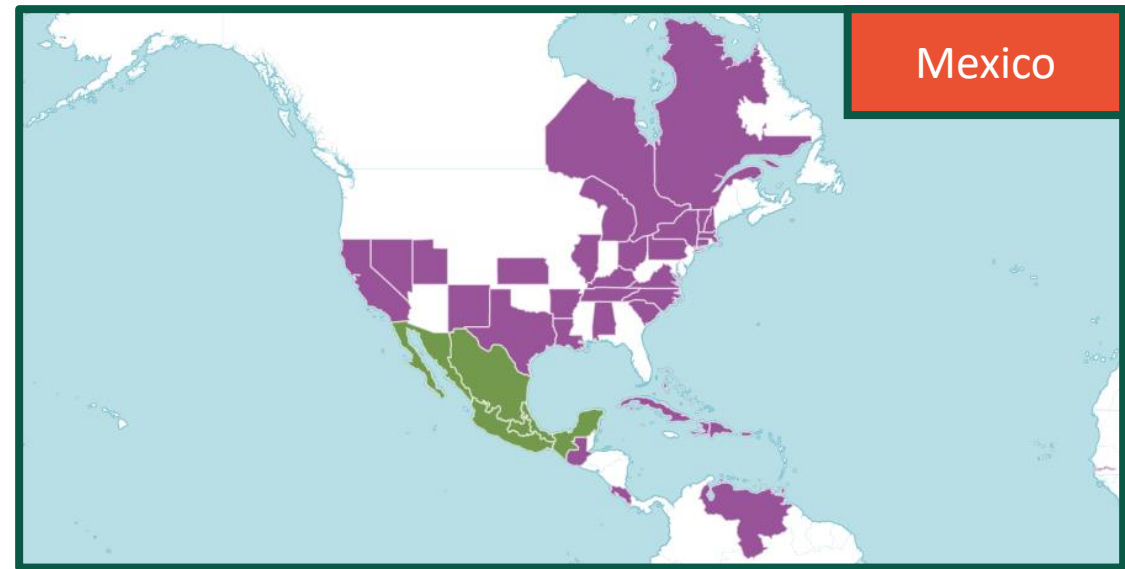
Rutaceae
Rue Family

Small Tree

* Will not survive a frost, only half-hardy, bring indoors in winter. Recommended pot plant.

Cucurbita pepo

Courgette, Pumpkin (also Summer Squashes)



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Christian Gutkier

'Jaguar' 'Orelia'
'Tristan' 'Yolanda'



Midsummer
- Early Autumn

Cucurbitaceae
Squash Family

3ft Annual

* Will not survive a frost, only half-hardy

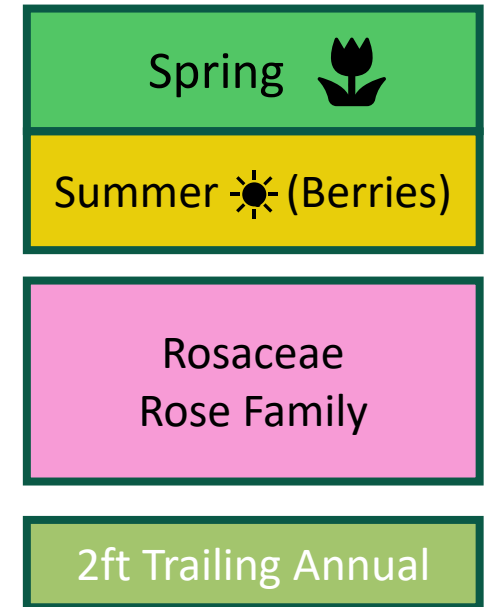
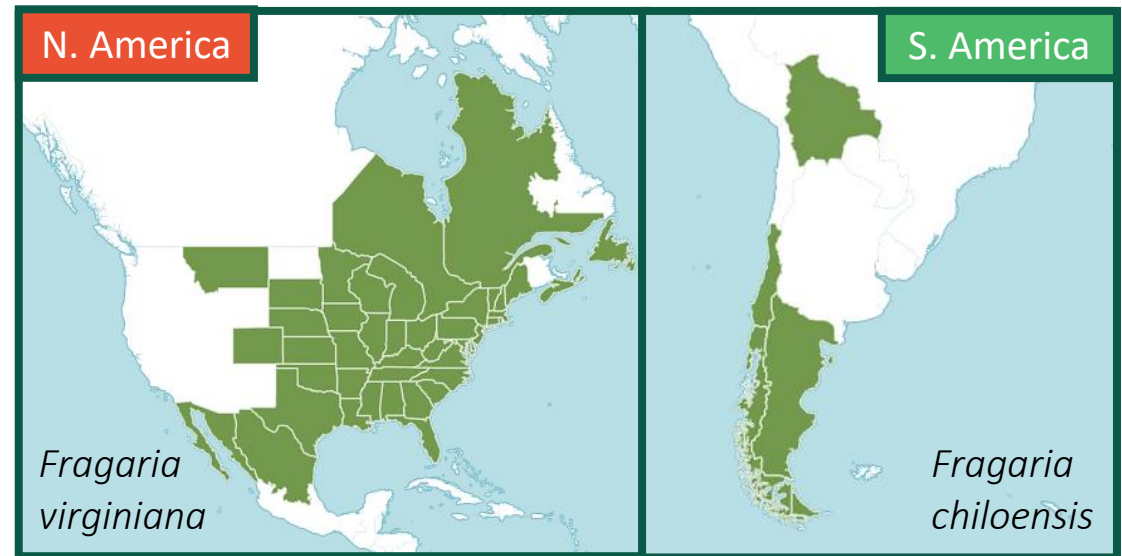
Fragaria x ananassa

Garden Strawberry

Fragaria virginiana x *Fragaria chiloensis*

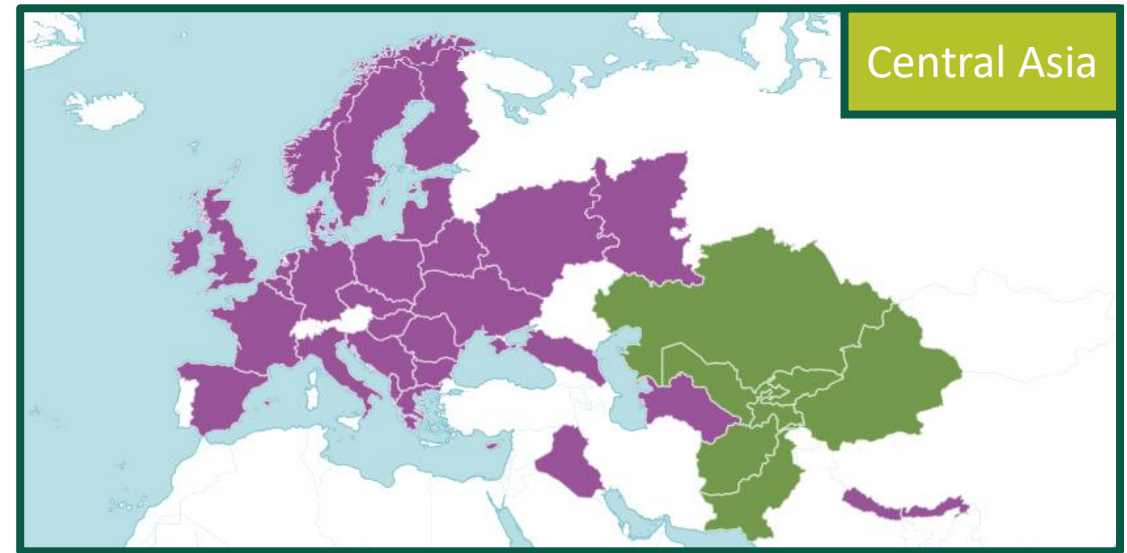


Photograph from Flickr (CC) Maja Damat




Malus domestica

Apple Tree



'Blenheim Orange'
'Worcester Pearmain'
'Bramley's Seedling'



Spring 

S/A (Fruits)

Rosaceae
Rose Family

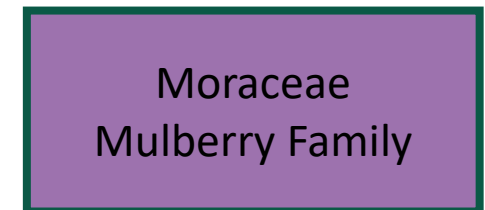
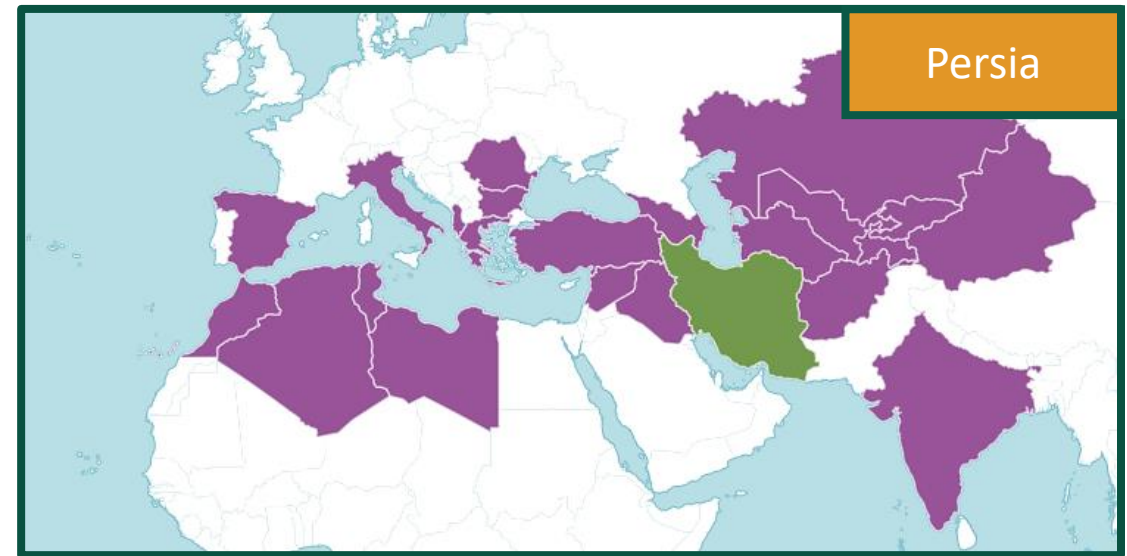
Small Tree

Morus nigra

Black Mulberry



Photograph from Wikipedia (CC) Wouter Hagens, Beko (Fruit)

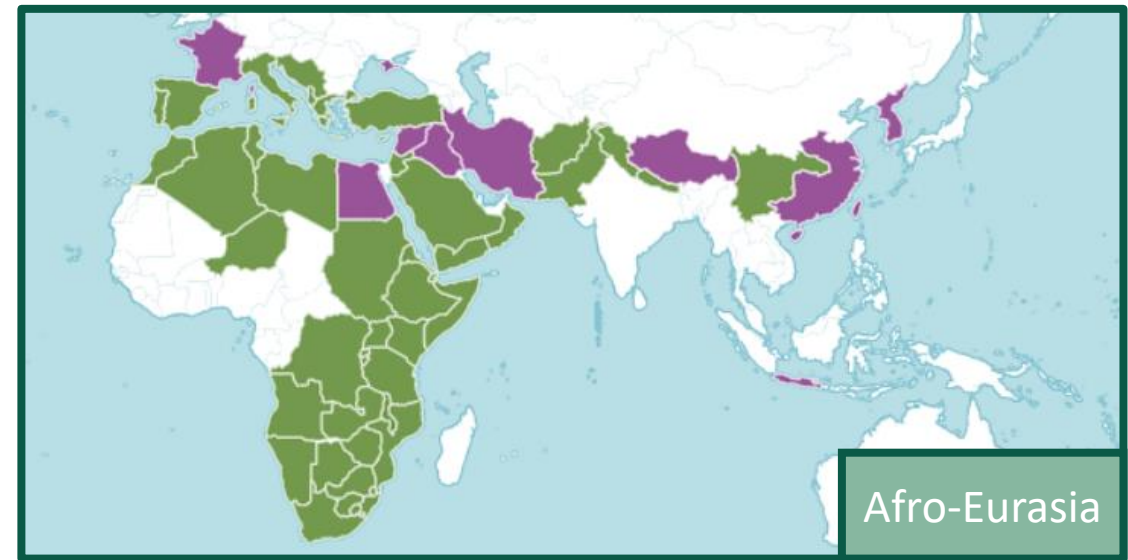


Olea europaea

Olive Tree



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Miltos Gikas



None

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". To the right of the logo is a white silhouette of a tree.

Summer ☀️

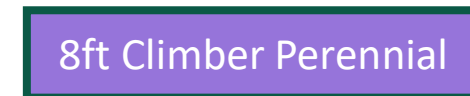
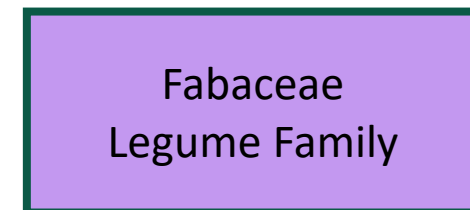
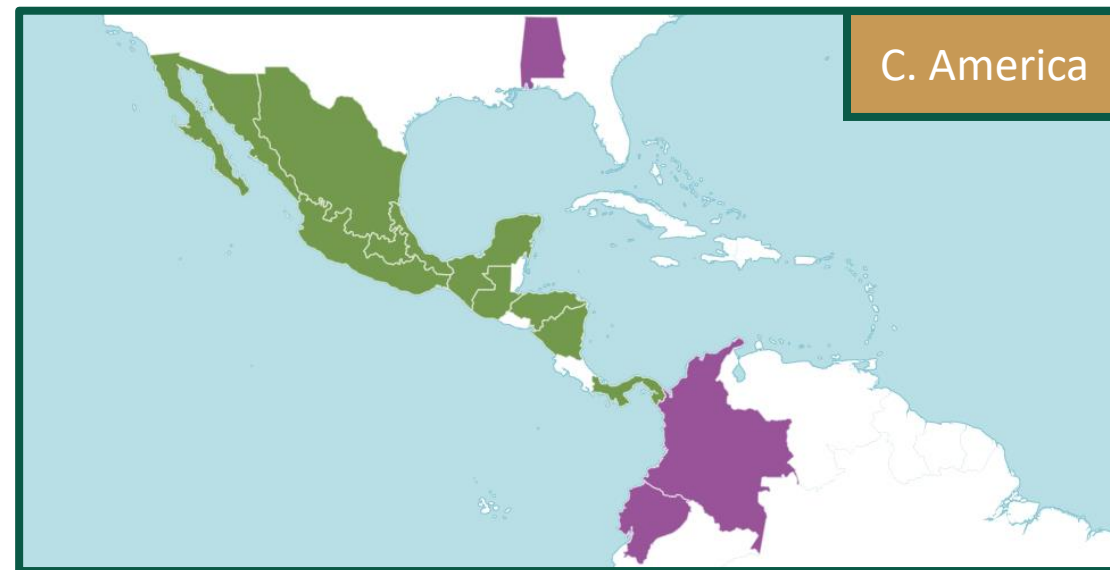
Oleaceae
Olive Family

Small Tree

* This plant will not survive below -10°C night temperatures, protect from very harsh winter nights

Phaseolus coccineus

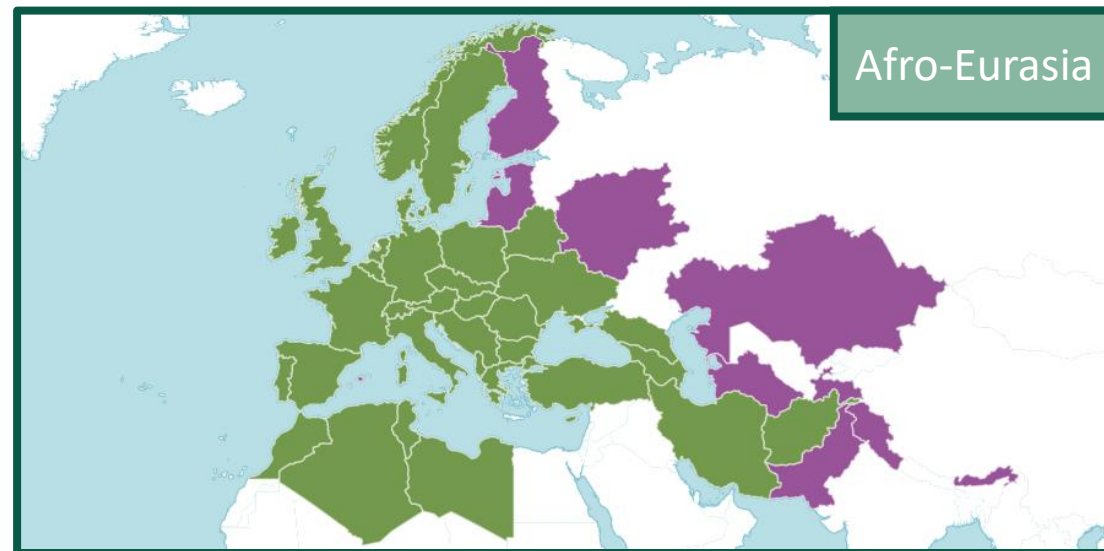
Runner Bean




* Will not survive a frost, only half-hardy

Prunus avium

Sweet Cherry Tree



'Morello' 'Penny'
'Summer Sun'

Spring 

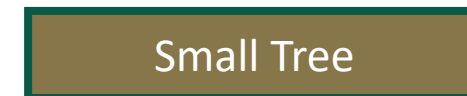
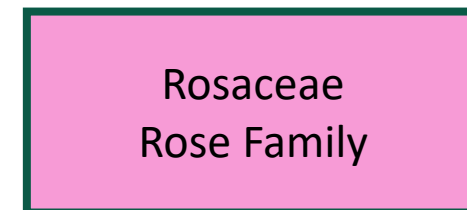
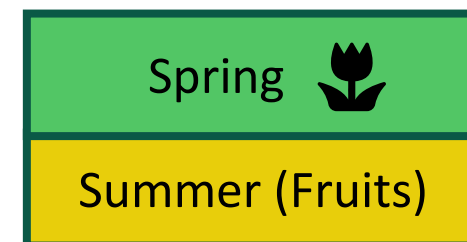
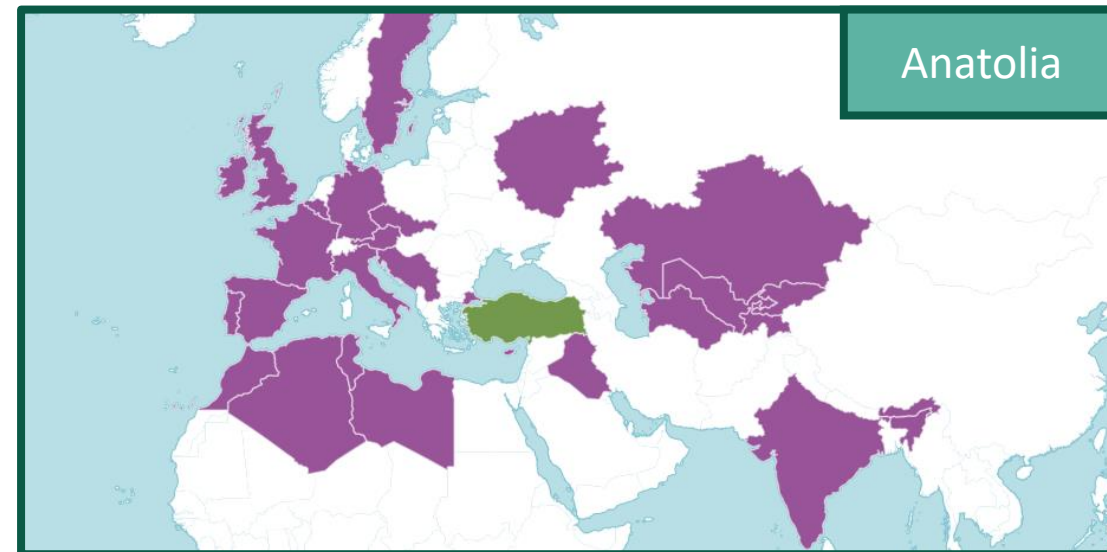
Summer (Fruits)

Rosaceae
Rose Family

Small Tree

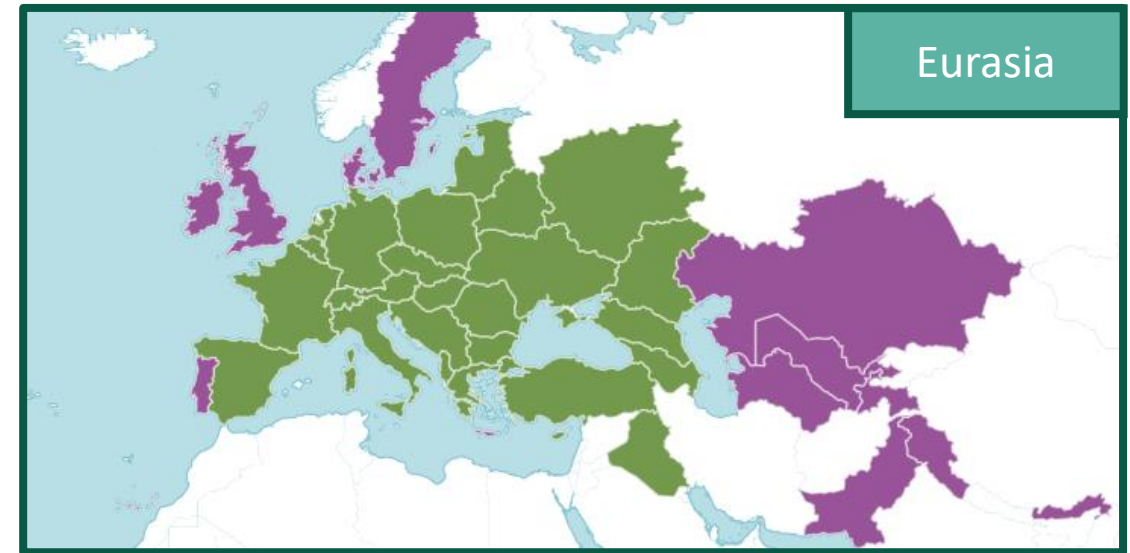
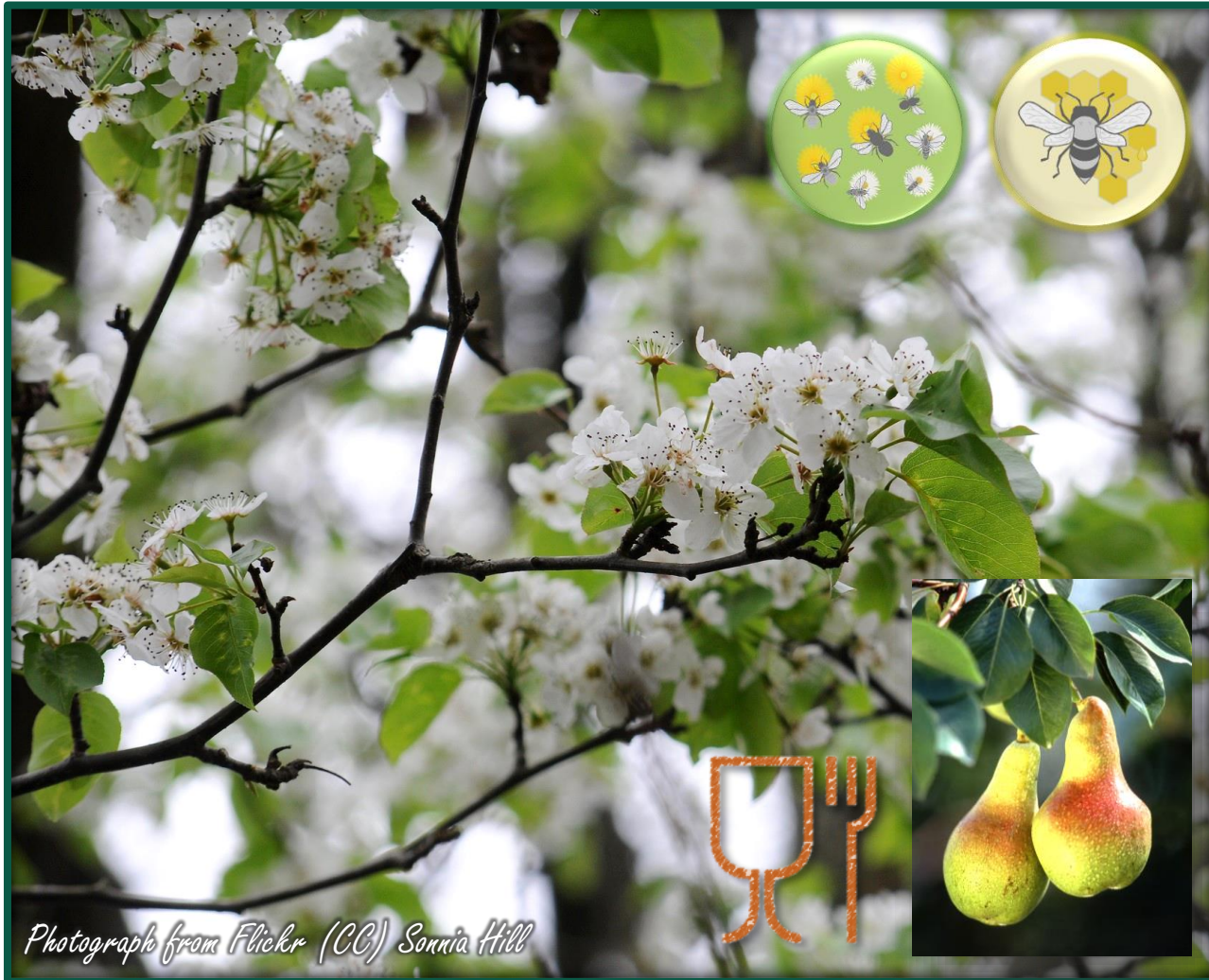
Prunus domestica

Garden Plum




Pyrus communis

Pear Tree



'Concorde'
'Doyenné du Comice'



Spring 

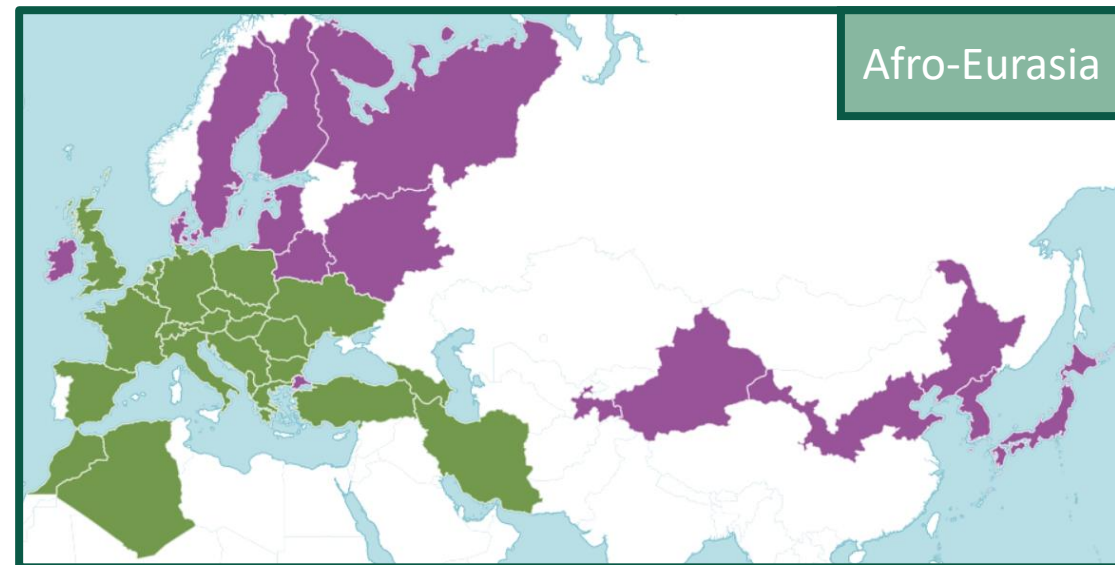
Summer (Fruits)

Rosaceae
Rose Family

Small Tree

Ribes uva-crispa

European Gooseberry



Photographs from Flickr (CC) Kev Wheeler (Fruit), Peter Stenzel (Flowers)



- Species -

Mid Spring
- Early Summer

Grossulariaceae
Currant Family

Small Shrub

Rubus fruticosus

Bramble, Blackberry



Photograph © Thomas McBride



'Loch Ness'
'Loch Tay'

Summer (Flowers)

Autumn (Fruit)

Rosaceae
Rose Family

Rambling Shrub

Rubus idaeus

European Raspberry



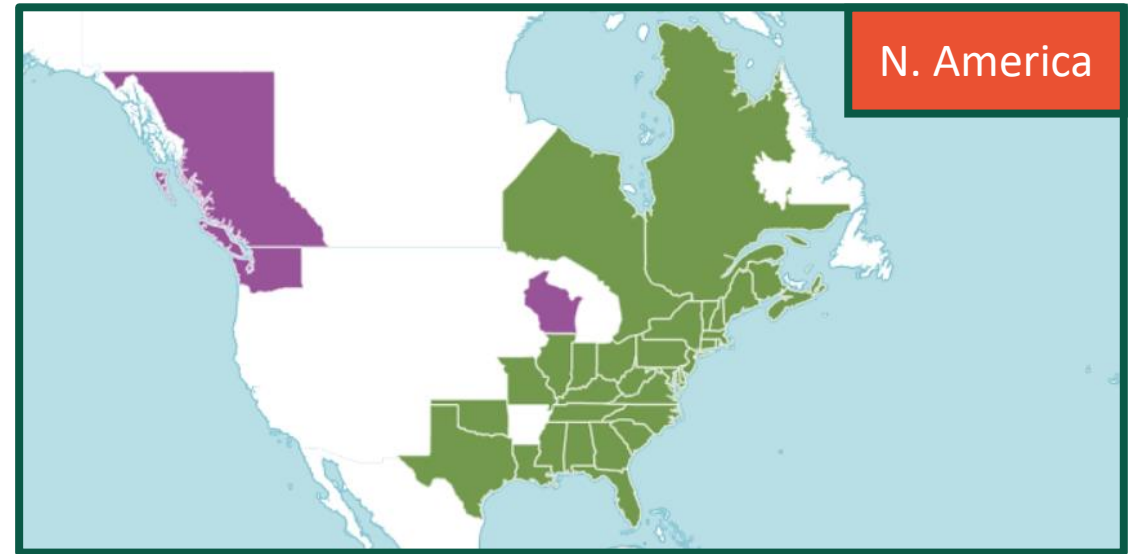
Photograph from Flickr (CC) Bjorn S, A Qiao (Flower)



- Summer (Flowers)
- Autumn (Fruit)
- Rosaceae
Rose Family
- Small Shrub


Vaccinium corymbosum


Garden Blueberry



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Maja Dumat (Flowers) & Rob Thurman (Fruit)



Late Spring 

Summer  (Berries)

Ericaceae
Heather Family

Medium Shrub

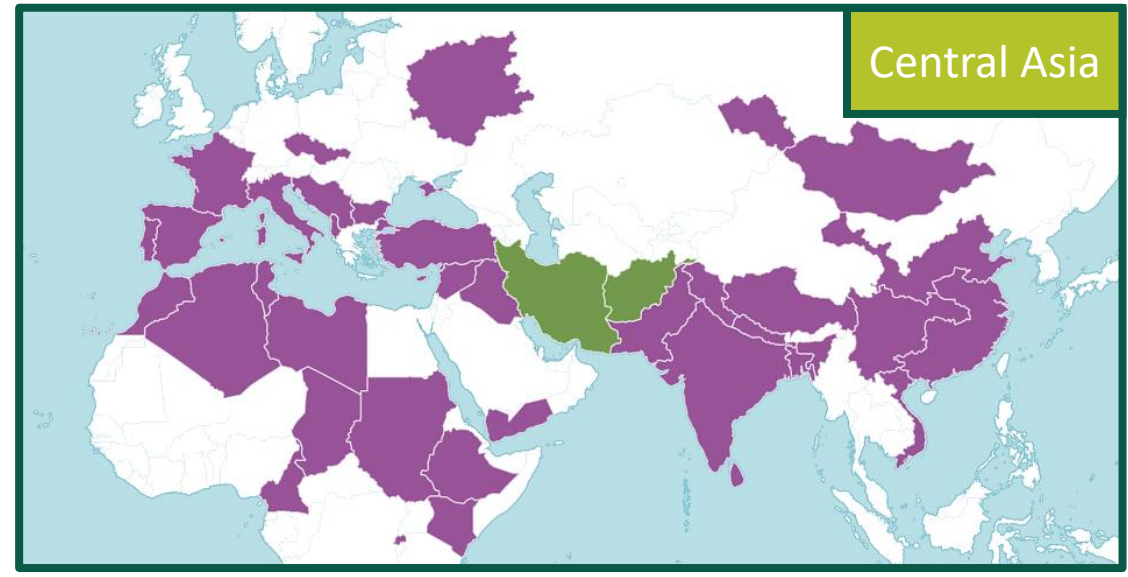
Vicia faba

Broad Bean



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Franziska Geiser

Photograph from Flickr (CC) Nicola Prisco



Central Asia

'Aguadulce'
'Meteor' *

RHS AWARD OF GARDEN MERIT

Late Spring
- Midsummer

Fabaceae
Legume Family

2ft Perennial

* This cultivar and many others are slightly tender (will not withstand temperatures below -10°C)

Vitis vinifera

Grapevine



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Andreas Rockstein, Morgan Sherwood (Fruit)



'Boskoop Glory'
'Purpurea'



Summer ☀

Vitaceae
Grape Family

10ft+ Vine



Herbs



Many of our common garden herbs have flowers that are very beneficial to pollinating insects. Plants particularly in the mint family (Lamiaceae) and carrot family (Apiaceae) produce flowers abundantly while also producing aromatic leaves. Unlike fruit picking, plants aren't exactly designed to have their leaves picked so, to keep them flowering profusely, pick the leaves sparingly to allow the plants to mature. Once mature, most of the perennial herbs will produce leaves far in excess of that which you can use in cooking.



Herbs are used in a culinary sense to impart flavour; usually in savoury dishes. However, many herbs are also useful medicinally. For a more comprehensive list, including their traditional uses, see 'Medicinal Plants for Pollinators'.



Allium schoenoprasum

Chives



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Jakub Cabal



None



Allium ursinum

Wild Garlic, Ramsons



None

Spring 

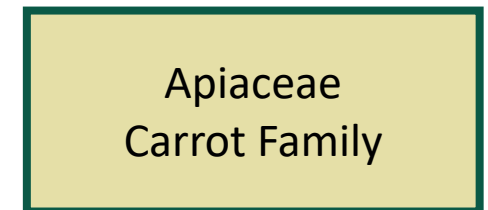
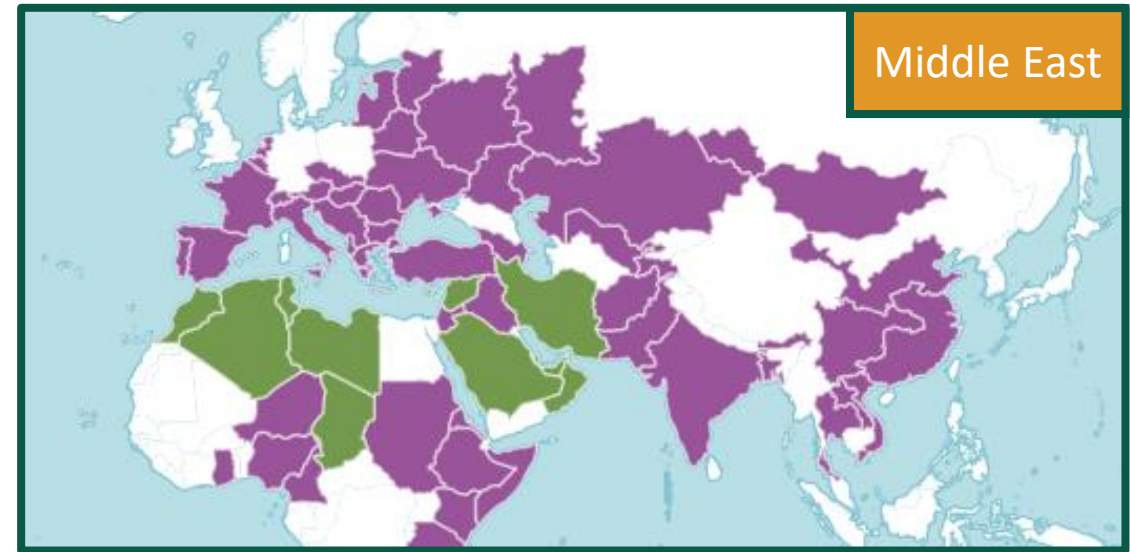
Amaryllidaceae
Daffodil Family

2ft Bulbous



Anethum graveolens

Common Dill

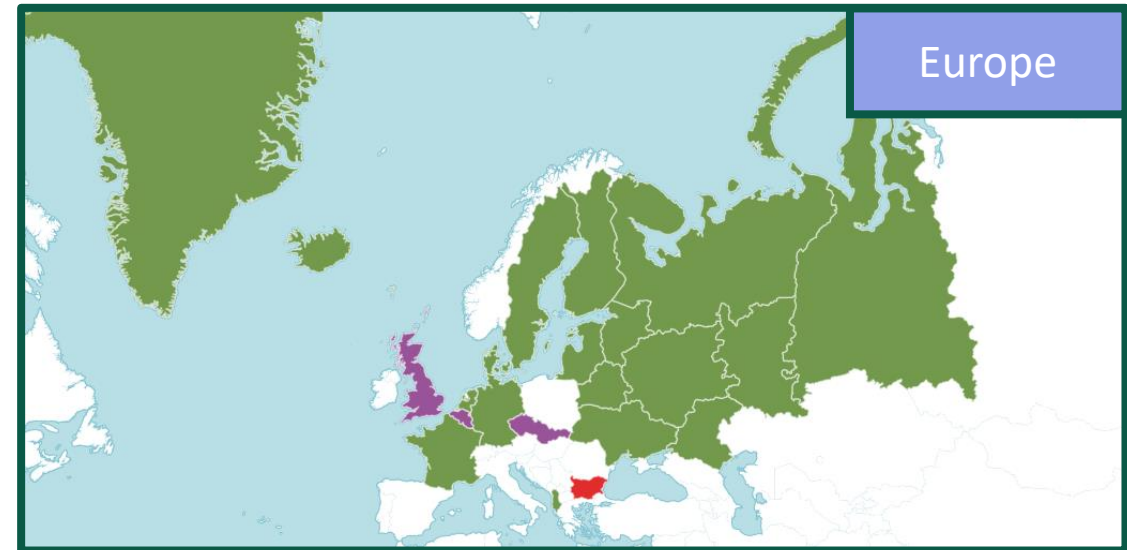


Angelica archangelica

Garden Angelica



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Christophe Christophe



Europe

Related Species: *Angelica sylvestris*

'Ebony'



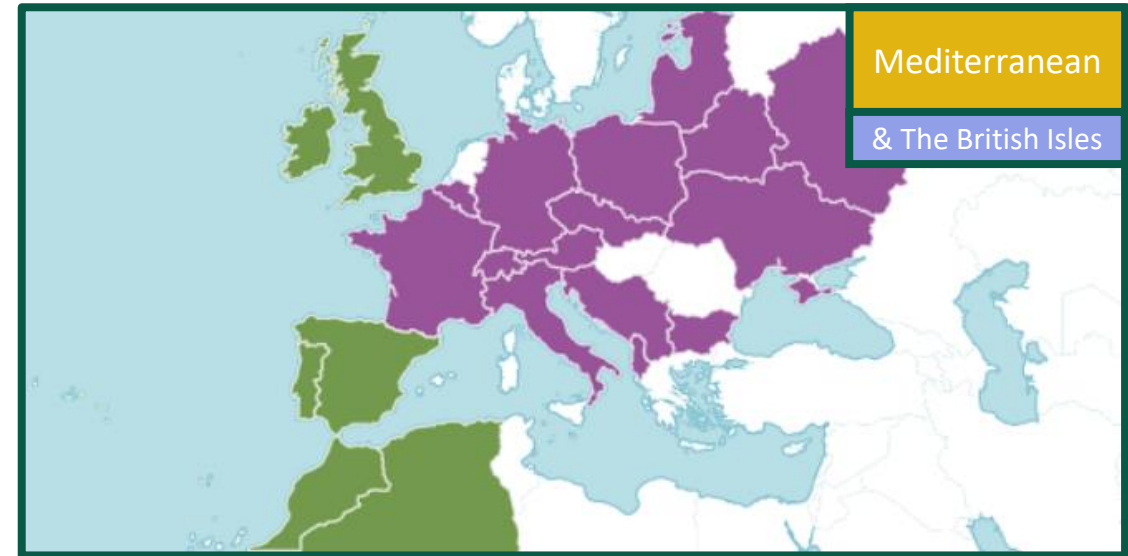
Summer ☀

Apiaceae
Carrot Family

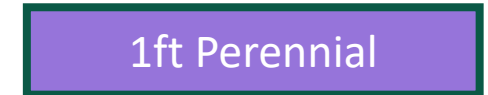
6ft Perennial

Chamaemelum nobile

Common Camomile

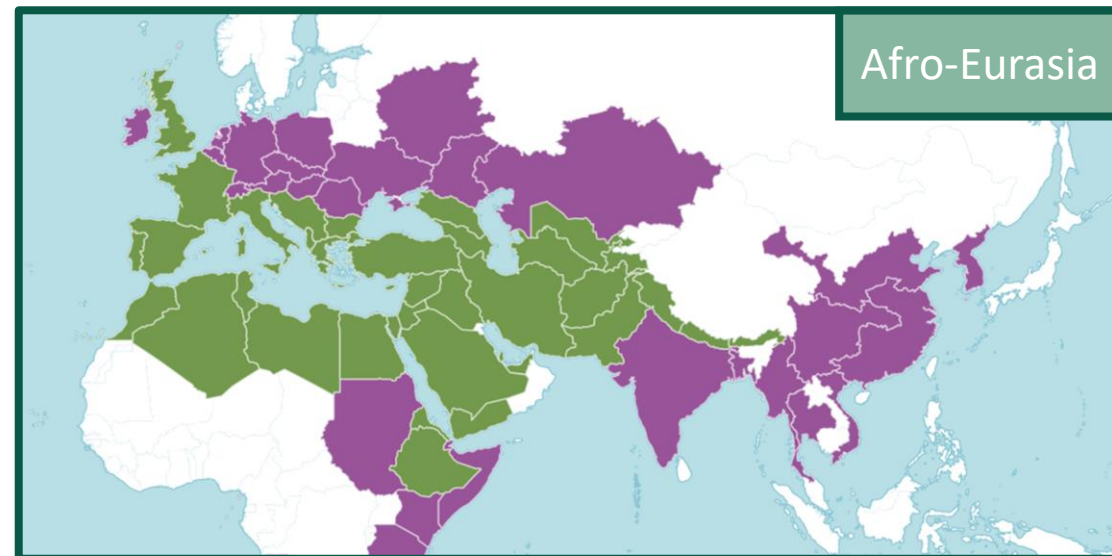


Photograph from Flickr (CC) Melanie Shaw



Foeniculum vulgare

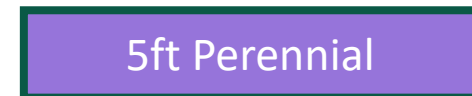
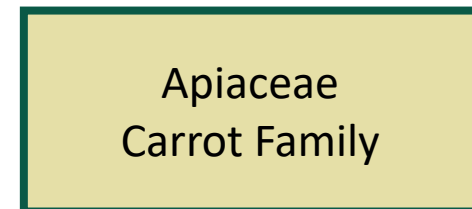
Common Fennel



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Katy Wrathall

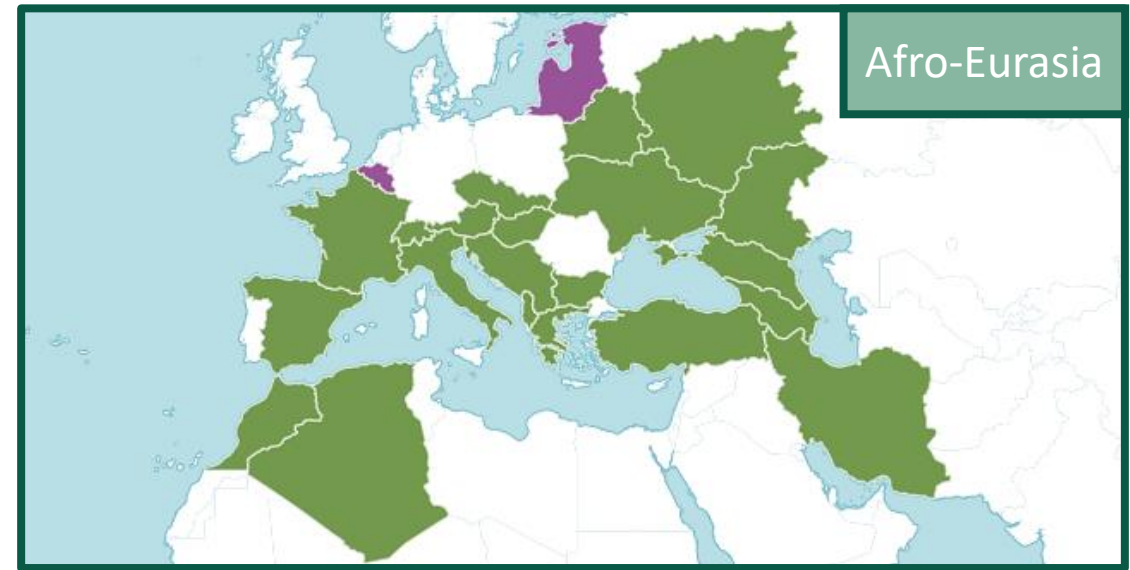


'Florence Fino'
'Florence Orion'



Hyssopus officinalis

Herb Hyssop



Midsummer
- Early Autumn

Lamiaceae
Mint Family

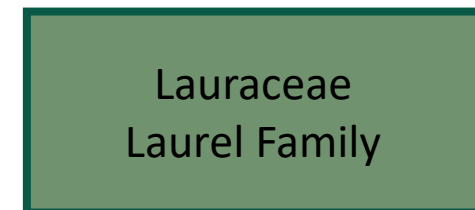
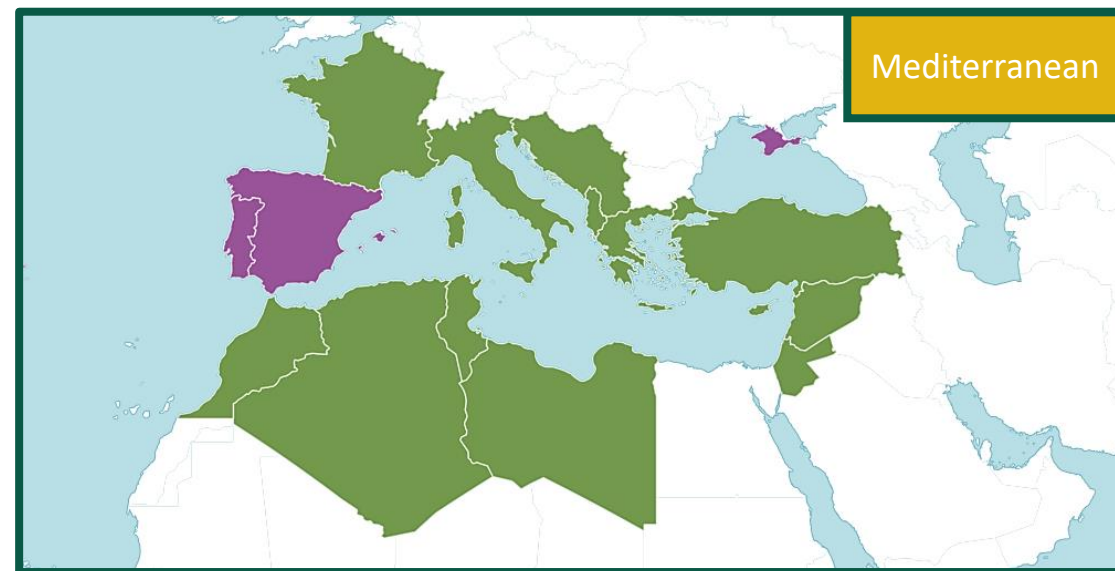
Small Subshrub

Laurus nobilis

Bay Tree, Laurel



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Jeremy Cherfas



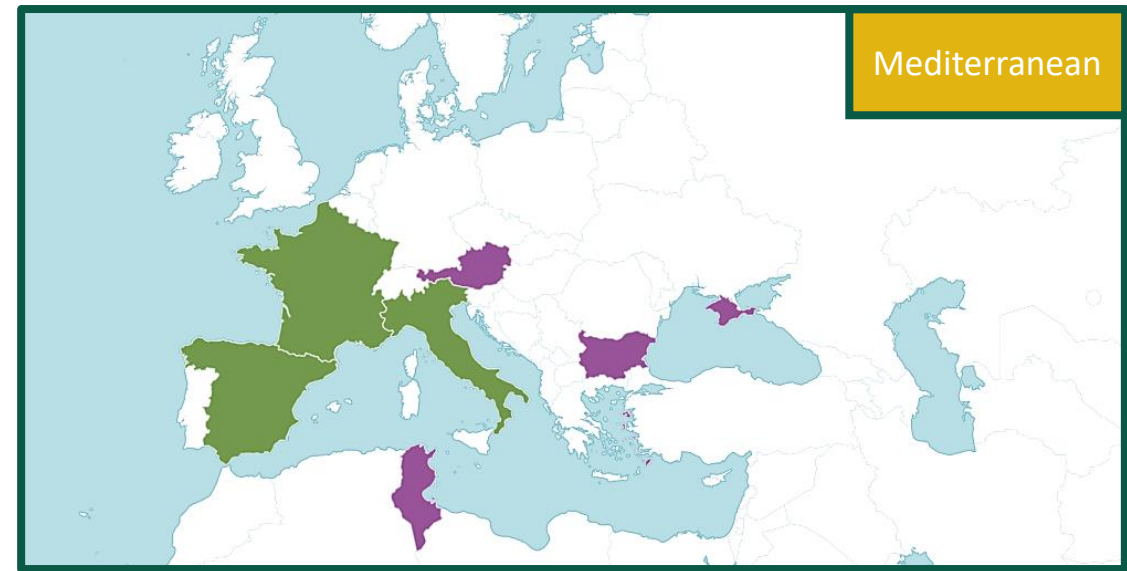
* Not to be confused with a shrub, often referred to as a laurel, which is actually a poisonous species of cherry. Its flowers are also white but without yellow pollen and occur on spikes.

Lavandula angustifolia

English Lavender



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Peter Taylor



'Folgate' 'Hidcote'
'Miss Katherine'



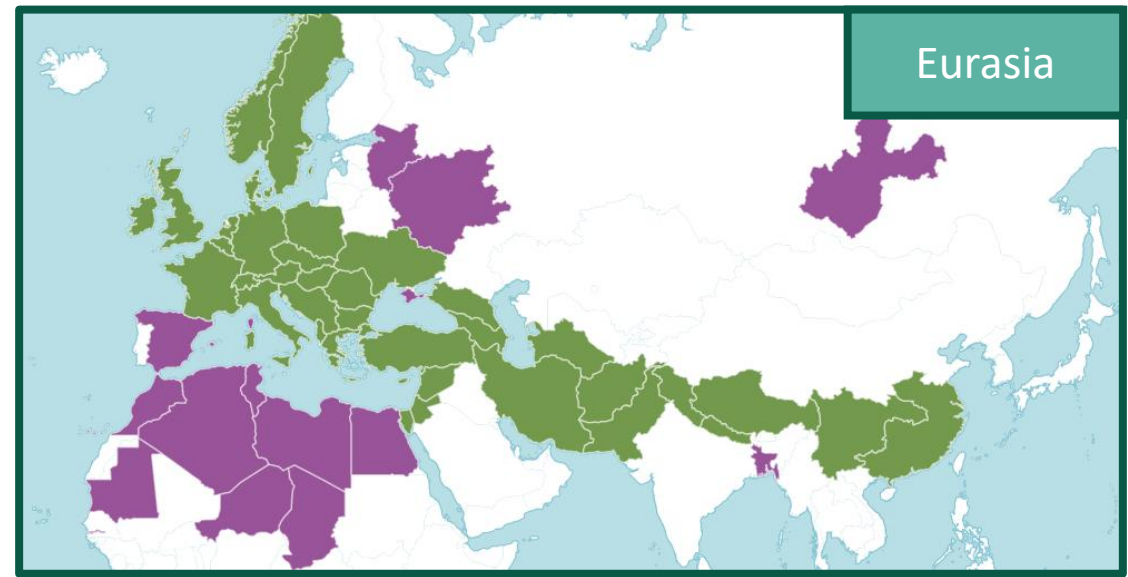
Summer ☀

Lamiaceae
Mint Family

Small Shrub

Mentha spicata

Spearmint



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Radu Chibzii



None



Origanum vulgare

Oregano Plant



Afro-Eurasia



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Gustav Og



'Aureum'

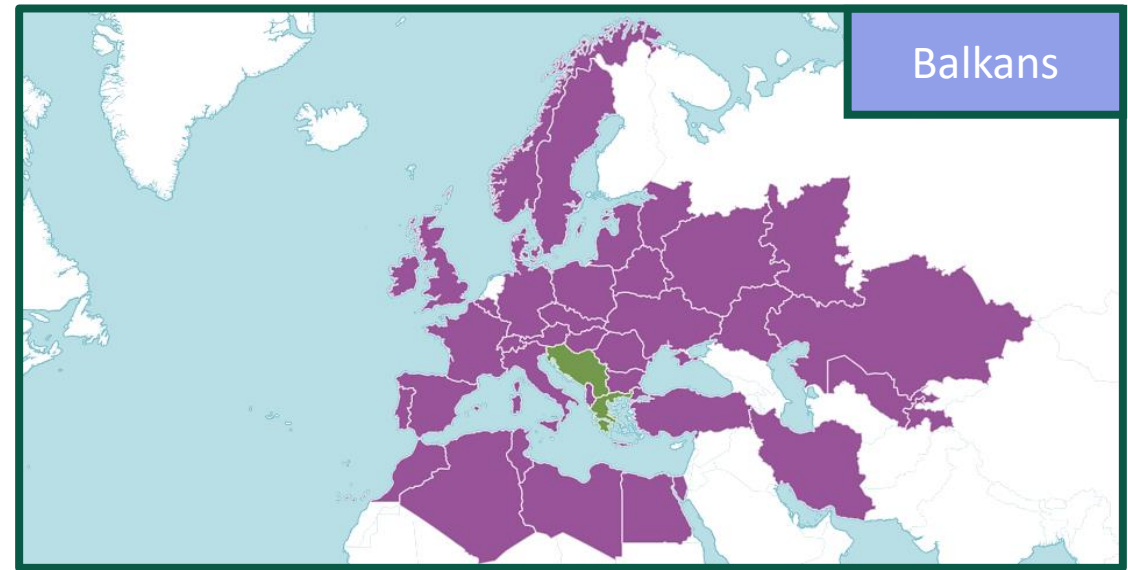
Midsummer
- Early Autumn

Lamiaceae
Mint Family

2ft Perennial

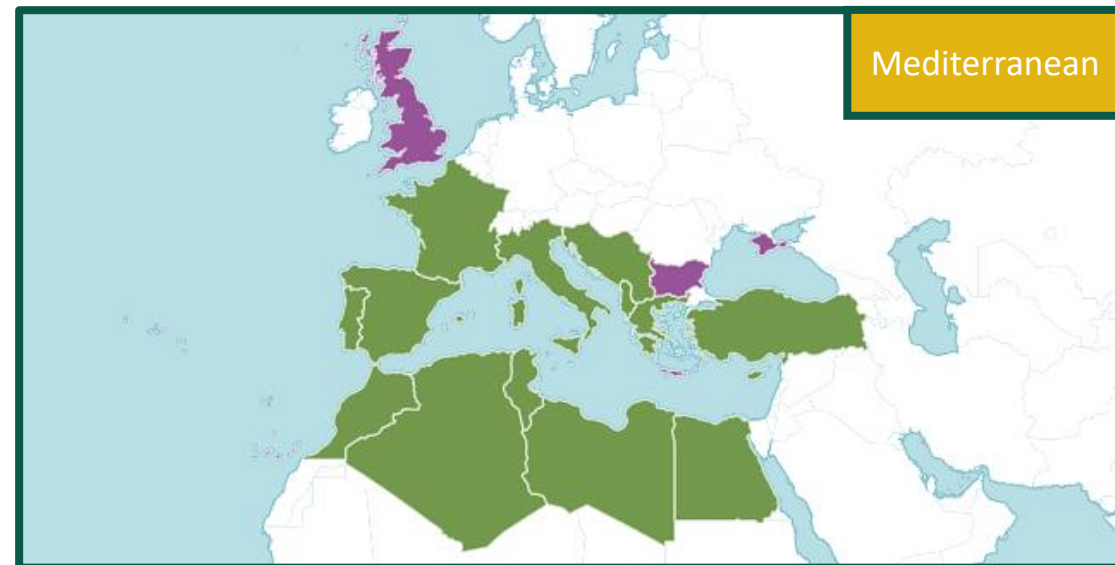
Petroselinum crispum

Parsley



Rosmarinus officinalis

Rosemary Plant



'Sissinghurst Blue'
'Miss Jessop'

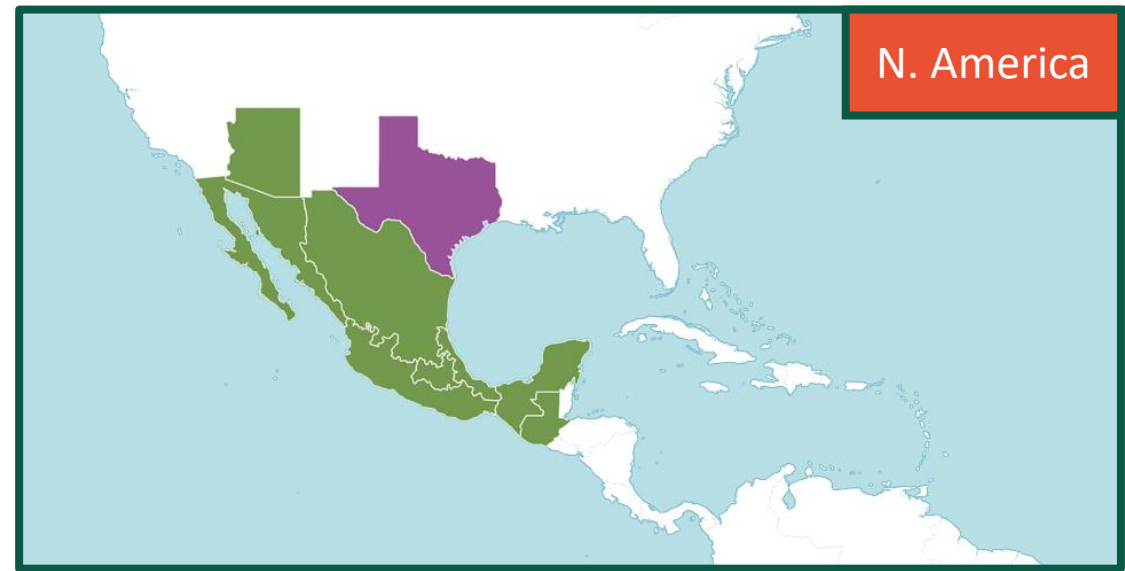
Late Spring
- Midsummer

Lamiaceae
Mint Family

Small Shrub

Salvia microphylla

Blackcurrant Sage

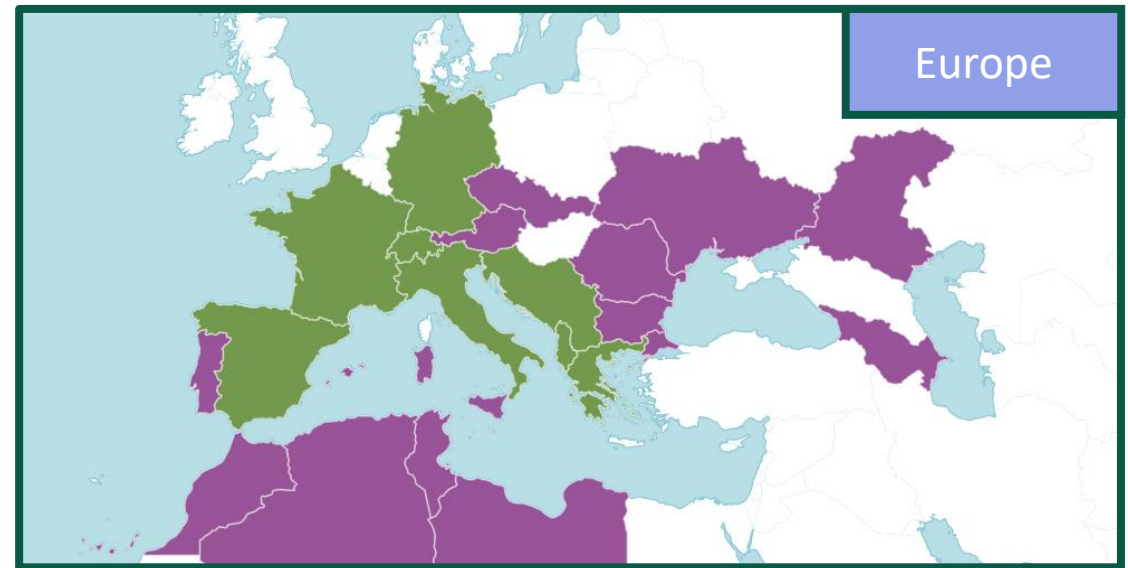


Photograph from Flickr (CC) Linda de Volder



Salvia officinalis

Garden Sage



'Berggarten' 'Icterina'
'Purpurascens'



Summer ☀

Lamiaceae
Mint Family

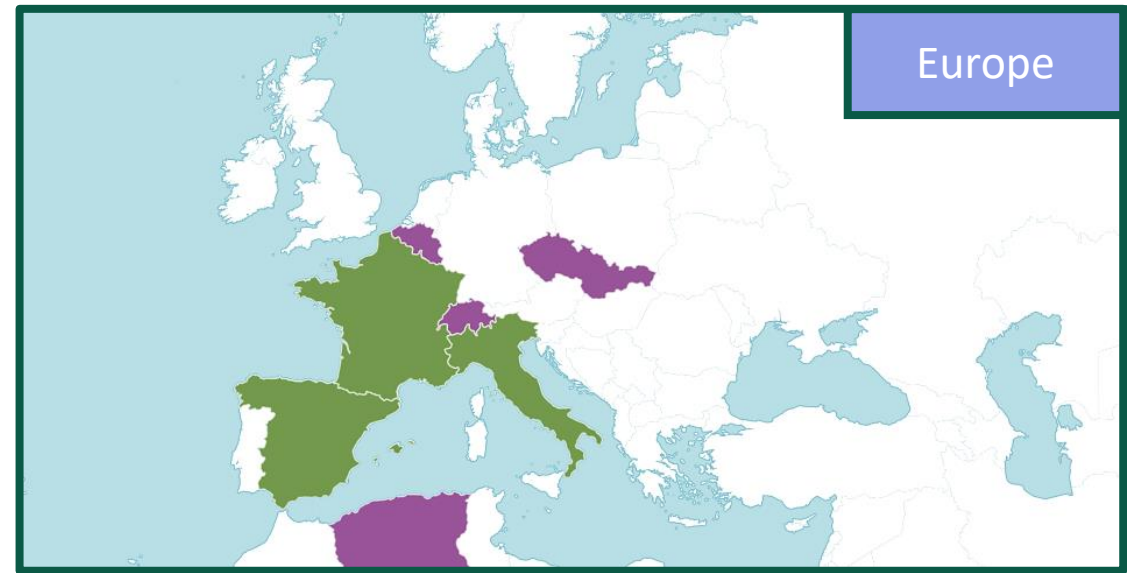
Small Sub-shrub

Thymus vulgaris

Common Thyme



Photograph from Flickr (CC) John Winder





Other usages for edible plants



Plants grown for fruit or aromatic leaves are two major groups of edibles to be found in an edible garden or allotment. However, there are several other groups. Plants with edible leaves, such as lettuce and cabbage, are seldom allowed to flower so are not included in this list with the exception of nasturtiums which flower prolifically but may have a few flowers or leaves picked to garnish a dish.

Some plants have edible flowers such as calendulas, roses, nasturtiums and elderflowers that may be used as a garnish or for flavouring sweet dishes and drinks, e.g. Elderflower Cordial.



The fourth major group of edible plants are those with edible roots. Plants such as beetroot, onions, potatoes, swedes and parsnips are not included in this list as, although they occasionally flower, they are either ill-advised to do so (affects the crop) or do so in only a small capacity. Potatoes will produce pollinator-friendly flowers. Chicory can be used for leaves or root but is included as it can be very attractive in an edible garden and is pollinator-friendly. Jerusalem Artichoke tubers can be sparingly harvested at the end of the flowering season and remaining tubers replanted. If you grow carrots, allow a few to bolt which will be beneficial for pollinators.

Finally, as for the remaining plants on this list, some plants are grown primarily for their seeds such as sunflowers, amaranth or nigella. Others are grown for their flower buds such as artichoke and caper so must be harvested sparingly to allow full flowering and access to nectar for pollinating insects.

Amaranthus caudatus

Love-lies-bleeding



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Alwyn Ladell



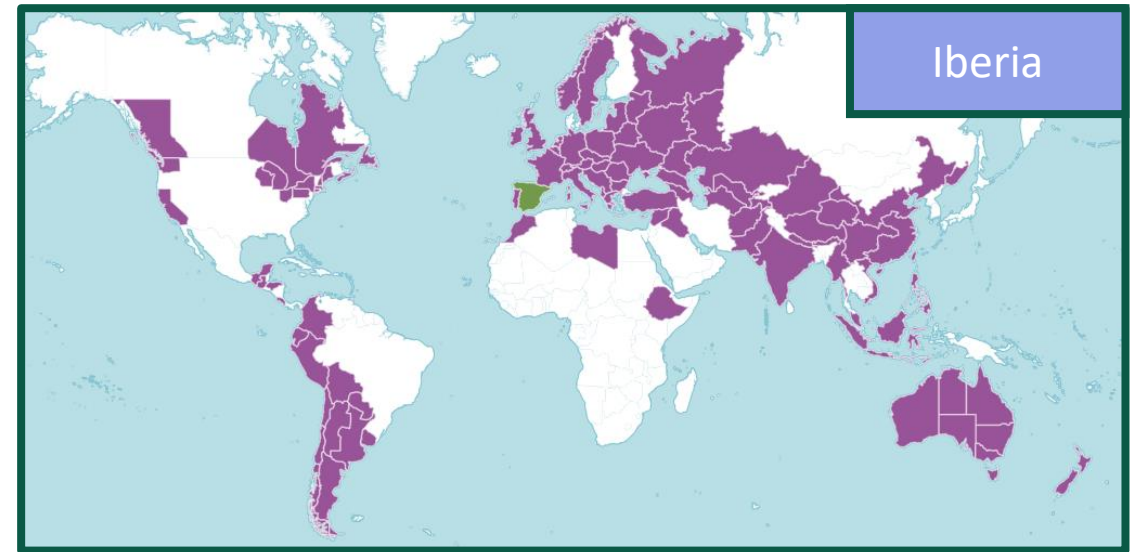
None



* Will not survive a frost, only half-hardy

Calendula officinalis

Common Marigold



'Fiesta Gitana'



Early Summer
- Early Autumn

Asteraceae
Daisy Family

2ft Annual

Capparis spinosa

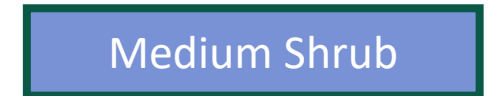
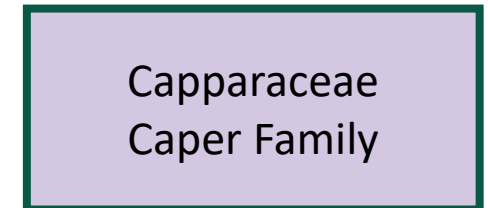
Caper Bush



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Tracie Hall



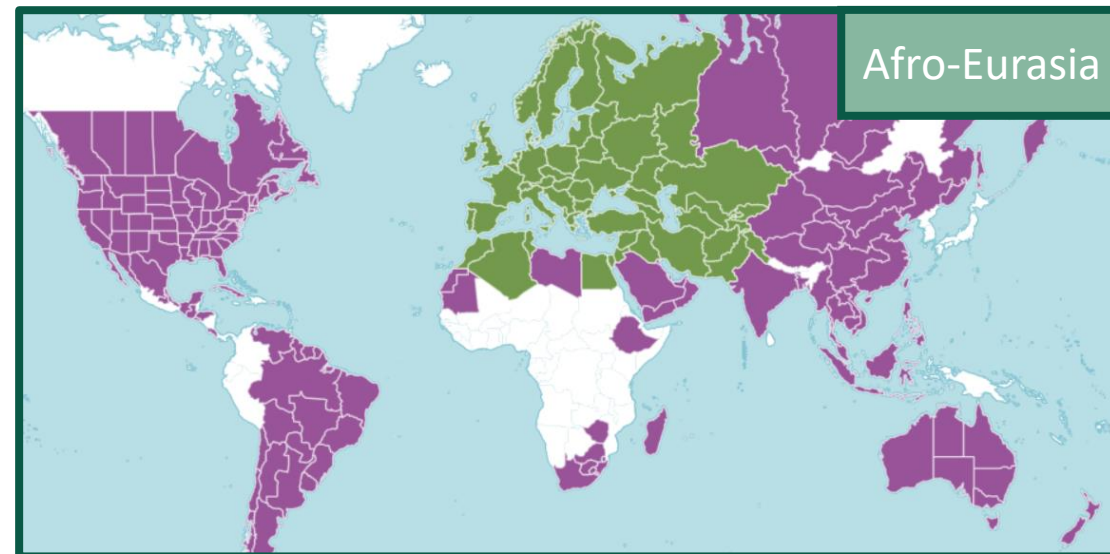
None



* This plant will not survive below -10°C night temperatures, protect from very harsh winter nights

Cichorium intybus

Chicory



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Dan Mullen



None



Cynara cardunculus

Artichoke, Cardoon



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Jörg Bergmann



Europe &
N. Africa

- Species -
'Gros Vert de Lâon'



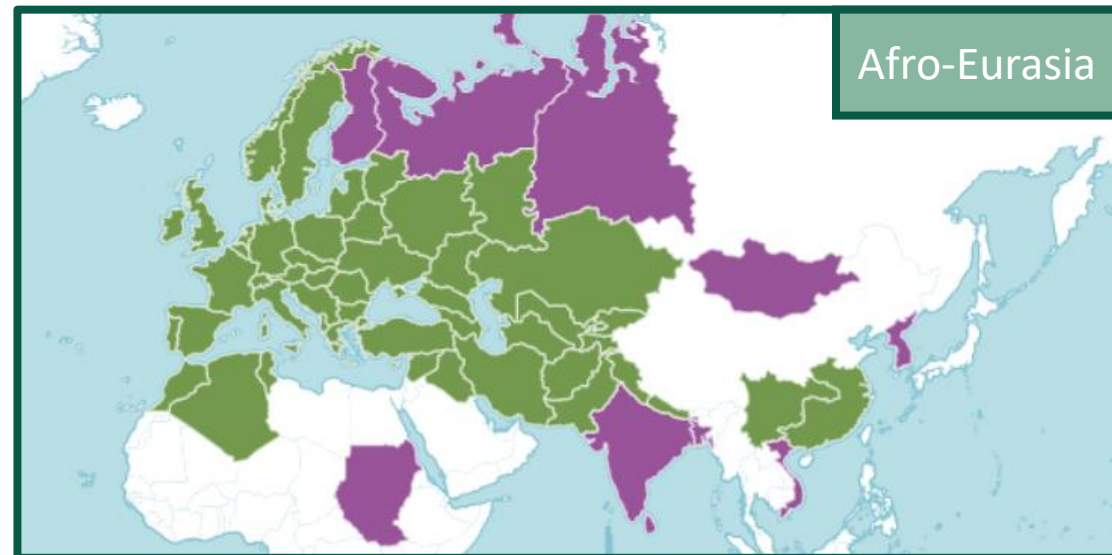
Midsummer
- Early Autumn

Asteraceae
Daisy Family

8ft Perennial

Daucus carota

Wild Carrot



Afro-Eurasia



Photograph © Thomas McBride

Various cultivars of
Ssp. sativus
(Domesticated Carrots)

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 tree icon.

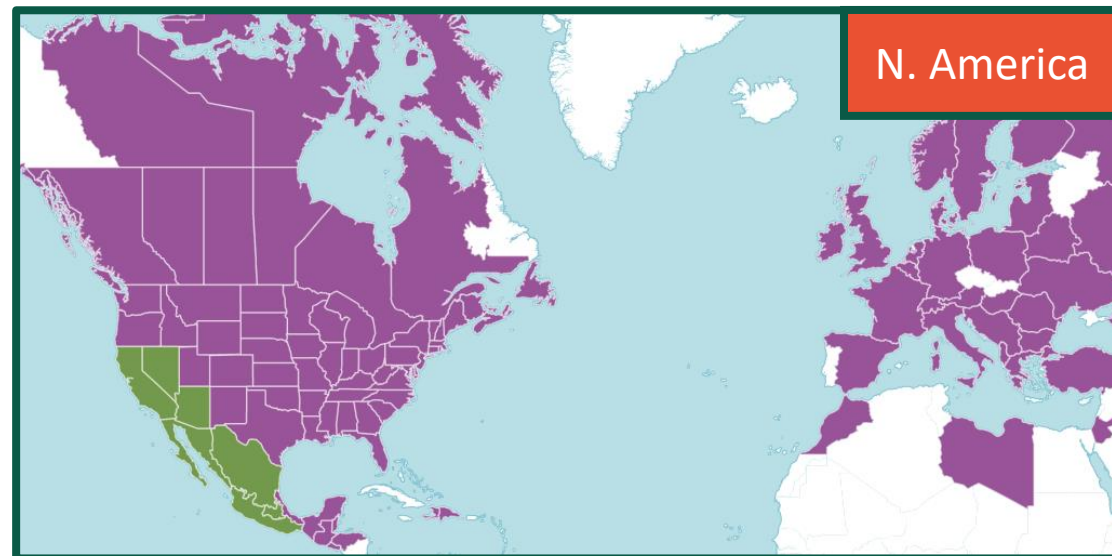
Summer ☀

Apiaceae
Carrot Family

3ft Perennial

Helianthus annuus

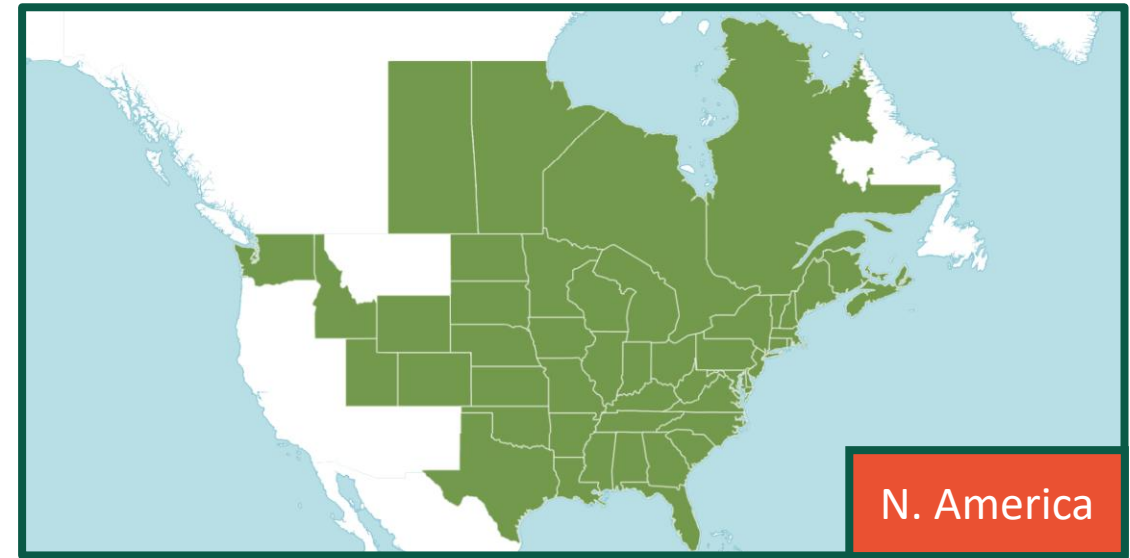
Common Sunflower



* Dry Seeds edible ('sunflower seeds'),
Seeds are harvested commercially for sunflower oil.

Helianthus tuberosus

Jerusalem Artichoke



'Lemon Queen'



Midsummer
- Early Autumn

Asteraceae
Daisy Family

6ft Annual

Humulus lupulus

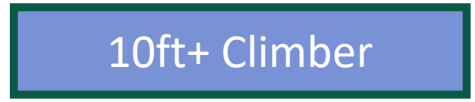
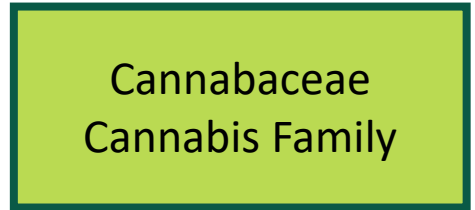
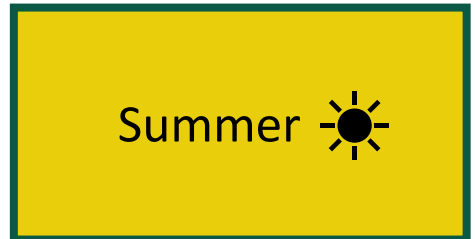
Hops



Photograph © Thomas McBride

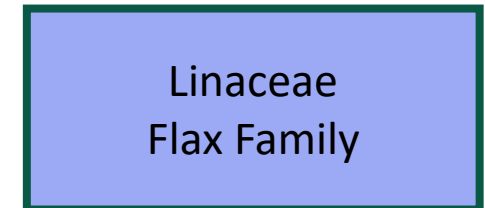
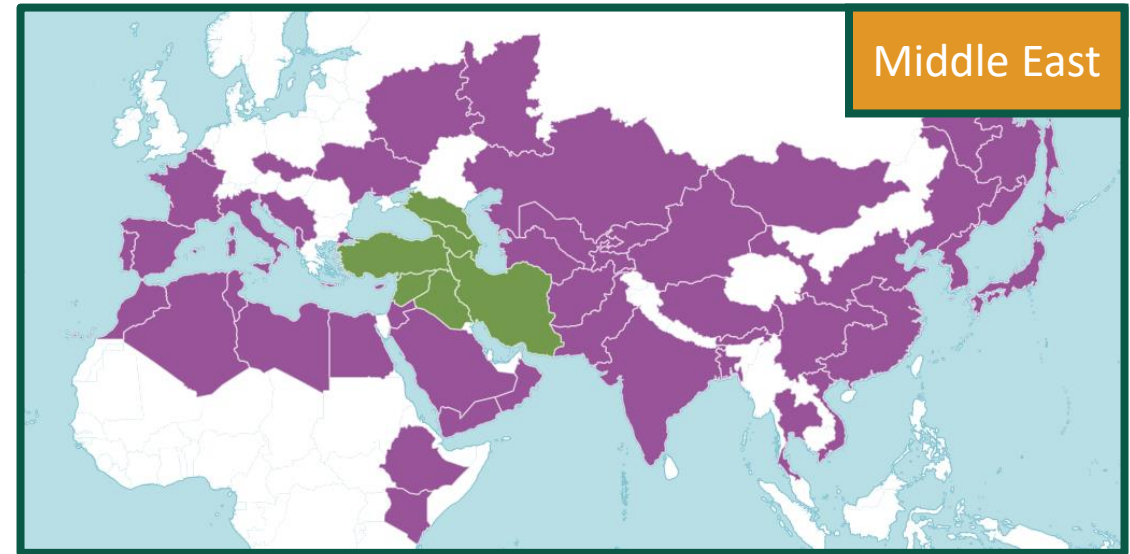


'Aureus'



Linum usitatissimum

Common Flax



Nigella damascena

Love-in-the-Mist



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Rainer Stropek



'Miss Jekyll'
'Miss Jekyll Alba'



Summer ☀

Ranunculaceae
Buttercup Family

2ft Annual

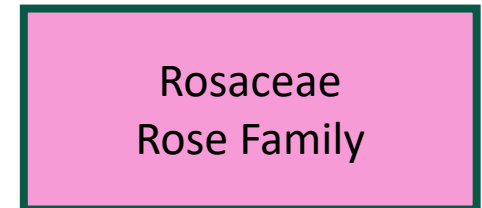
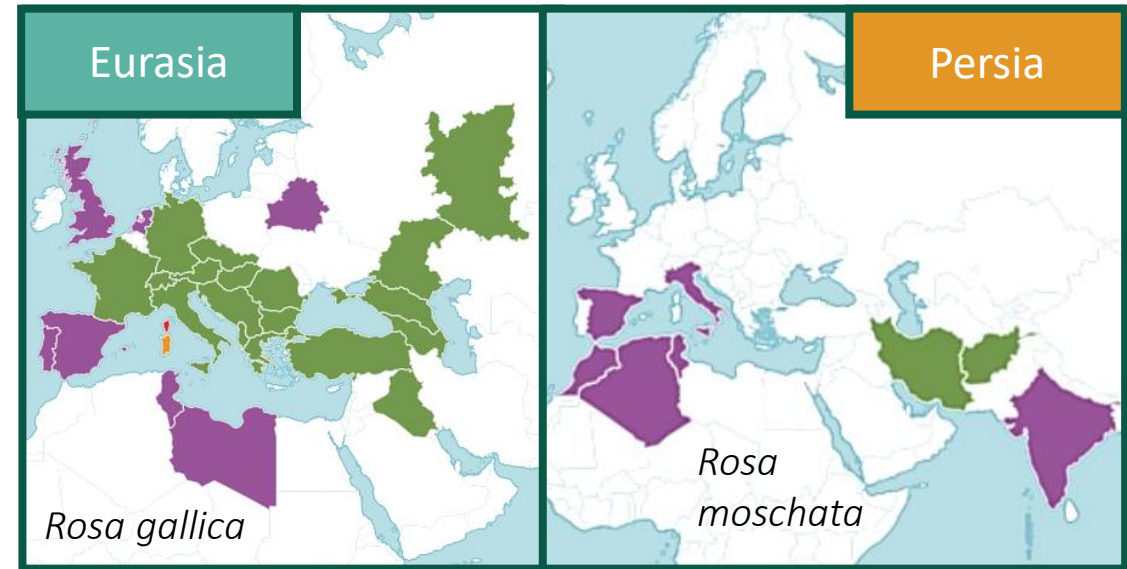
Rosa x damascena

Damask Rose

Rosa gallica x *Rosa moschata*

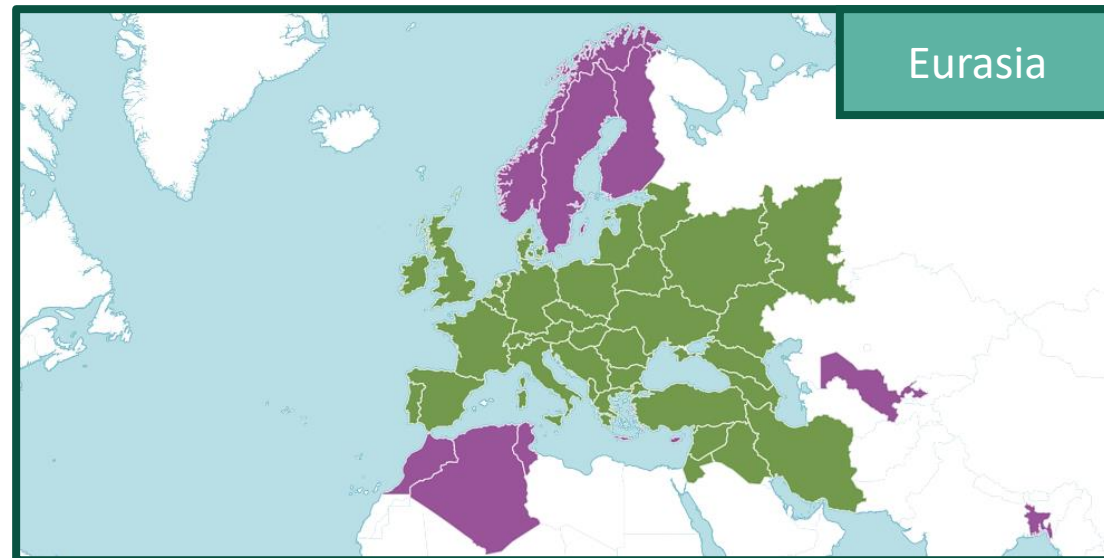


Photograph from Flickr (CC) A Qiao



Sambucus nigra

Common Elder



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Andreas Rockstein



f. laciniata
'Thundercloud'

Late Spring
- Midsummer

Adoxaceae
Moschatel Family

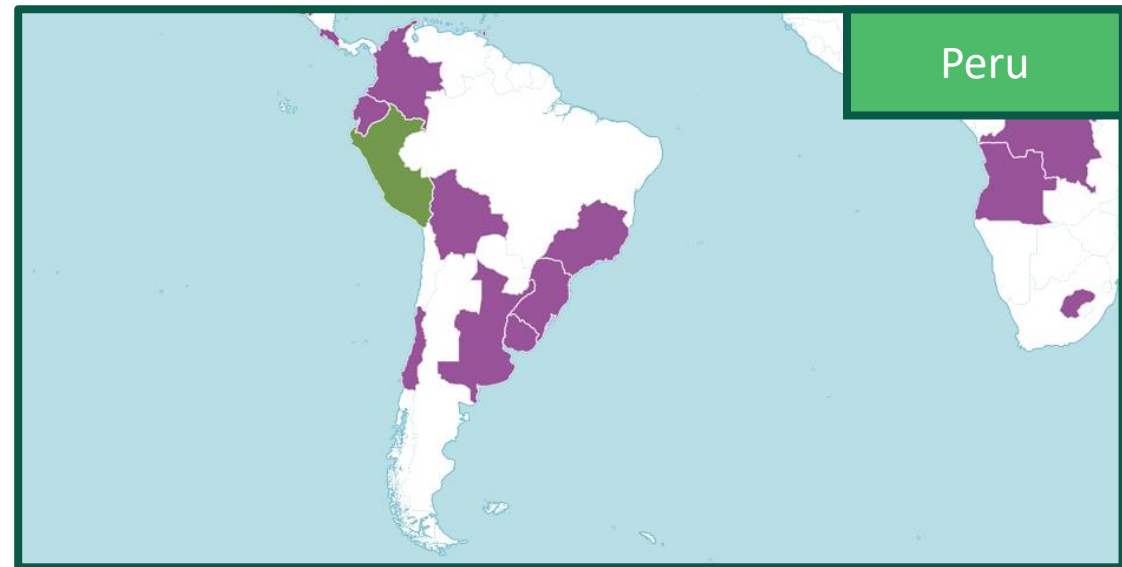
Small Tree

Tropaeolum majus

Garden Nasturtium



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Mayank Sharma



'Alaska series'
'Whirlybird series'



Midsummer
- Early Autumn

Tropaeolaceae
Nasturtium Family

1ft Trailing Annual

* This plant will not survive below -5°C night temperatures