

Plant Highlight: Columbine

Latin: *Aquilegia x hybrids*

The columbine plant has delicate looking, nodding flowers which resemble a pointed crown. The flowers can be blue, purple, pink, white, red, yellow or even brown; in single or double forms. The plant itself can be many sizes 6” – 3 ‘ but is usually recognized for its foliage. It’s often described as gray-green with leaves biternate (twice divided into segments of three). The various size options lead to it being included in many garden spaces including rock gardens and perennial beds.



Member of the buttercup family, there are 100 or so species of columbines native to North America, Europe and Asia. Additionally, they have been hybridized.

Columbines generally begin blooming in early to mid-May and continue through June. The blooms appear from mid-spring until early summer with the individual flowers have five nectary tubes (spurs) that protrude on the back of the flower. In North America, the columbine was here before the introduction of the domesticated bee. That fact, and the flower structure lead to the plant being primarily pollinated by various moths and hummingbirds.

Columbines are easy to grow when planted in fertile, well-drained soil. Soil pH is not critical, with the usual recommendation of 5.8 to 6.5. They have very few pest issues but are a short-lived perennial. Most hybrid plants live three or four years, but in the meantime, it has reseeded freely. However, very few gardeners find them weedy or offensive. If plants come up in unwanted areas; they can easily be relocated.

Removing flowers as they fade (dead heading) helps prolong the bloom time. It also prevents the formation of seed pods. Columbines cross-pollinate and hybridize freely, but the quality of resulting seedlings is often inferior and an interesting array of plant types and flower colors.

We are currently enjoying this popular garden flower in Flagpole garden at the Extension office but it is also a great cut flower.

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