

Gazing on their beauty easily stirs one's emotions. Their appearance arouses interest and creates excitement. Their name says it all. They are *Purple Sensation*.

Last fall, while looking for spring flowering bulbs, I encountered a display of *Purple Sensation* bulbs beautifully advertised with a large colored photo. In years past, knowing these plants belong to the genus *Allium*, which also includes onions, garlic and shallots, I had purposely avoided planting them in our landscape. My reason—I greatly dislike the smell of onions. The beauty of the photograph changed my mind. I purchased a couple dozen bulbs and immediately planted them in our flower borders. Today, I wish I would have purchased and planted more. *Purple Sensation* is now in full bloom, and as stated before, the name says it all. They are sensational.



Since planting this variety, I have spent a considerable time expanding my general knowledge of alliums. Unlike their smelly cousins, the flowers of ornamental allium, sometimes called a flowering onion, have no unpleasant scent; many cultivars are even said to be sweetly perfumed. Only when the flower or foliage is cut will one detect the faint scent of onions.

Ornamental allium

offers an assortment of attributes. By now, most tulips, daffodils and other typical spring flowering bulbs are beginning to fade. Because the majority of alliums bloom late spring to early summer, they bridge the gap between spring and summer flowering plants.

Exceptionally easy to grow, ornamental alliums are hardy to Zone 4. They endure an assortment of soil types as long as there is good drainage. Considered drought-tolerant, alliums prefer to be grown in drier soil. They perform best in full sun but can be planted near deciduous trees where no shade exists early in the season, and they generally do well.

The leaves of most alliums are long, narrow and flattened — similar to daylily leaves. Like most spring flowering bulbs, the foliage of alliums die back a few weeks after flowering. As with most spring flowering bulbs, one should not remove the foliage until it has fully yellowed and died. Since the allium plants completely disappear by summer, they are best planted near other perennials or annuals that will fill the space.

Rarely are alliums bothered by insect pests or disease. One never has to worry about allium foliage or bulbs being destroyed by rodents or deer. Like me, these four-legged critters have no appreciation for the smell or taste of onions.

The flowers of all alliums are similar in nature. Most bear spheres or loose clusters of star-shaped flowers in shades of purple, white, blue, pink, or yellow. They range in height from tall growing species reaching four-to-five feet to miniatures reaching only a few inches tall. Low growing alliums are ideal for borders and rock gardens; whereas, tall-growing alliums are attractive in the background of flower beds and borders. The taller varieties make wonderful cut flowers that last or can be cut and dried for floral arrangements.

In addition to *Purple Sensation*, a few other popular varieties include *Globemaster*, *Schubert*, and *Ivory Queen*. *Globemaster* is one of the tallest with huge, globe-shaped flowerheads on three to four foot stems. *Schubert* is only eight inches tall, but its flowerhead resembles that of exploding pink fireworks. *Ivory Queen* is only one foot tall with large white globes.

Unfortunately, allium bulbs are not for sale at this time of year. They are only available in the fall. Make a note, and next autumn consider planting a few alliums. I'm confident alliums in your landscape will pique your interest and excite your emotions.