



# Top 52 Bulbous

## Plants for Pollinators

The best plants grown from bulbs, tubers or rhizomes,  
to plant 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



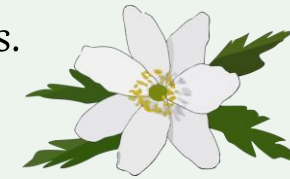
The majority of Garden Plants, excluding shrubs, are herbaceous which means they grow each year and have no lasting woody stems above ground. Bulbous plants are a subsection of herbaceous as they have significant storage organs near to the ground which remain over the plant's dormant period; providing energy and allowing for vigorous growth the following year. Due to this adaptation, bulbous plants are often (but not always) fast growing and may be earlier flowering than their herbaceous relatives.



Onion Bulb



Many bulbous plants are monocotyledonous, meaning they have one leaf sprout (cotyledon), such as onions. A few bulbous plants are dicotyledonous such as species in the Oxalidaceae and Ranunculaceae. It is important to note that, while all significant, subterranean storage organs are known as 'bulbs' in horticulture, botanists distinguish true bulbs from rhizomes, corms and tubers. True bulbs, with the exception of some Oxalis, are exclusively found in the monocots whereas Tubers and Corms tend to be Eudicots such as Dahlias and Anemones respectively. Rhizomes are found throughout many taxa.



Potato Tuber





# Planting with Bulbs – Rhizome, Corm or Tuber – Does it matter?



Bulbous Plants can be some of the easiest to grow as they require little attention once they're established and will often spread over a large areas such as bluebells or grape hyacinths. The majority of bulbous plants prefer being planted only a few cm under the soil so light and air can easily penetrate.

Botanically, whether a bulb is a true bulb, rhizome, corm or tuber, is important, but it makes little difference in horticulture to how the plant is grown. However the differences are as follows:



**True Bulbs** have multiple fleshy scales separated by layers of epithelium tissue. These layers are essentially underground leaves. A common example of a true bulb is the onion (fig.1) which shows clear layers. The growing point of a bulb is the centre which is a modified underground stem. Key bulbous families include Liliaceae, Amaryllidaceae and some Oxalidaceae.

Fig. 1

**Corms** are also modified underground stems but are made from solid tissue rather than leaf-like layers. Corms, such as the crocomia (fig. 2) have nodes just like standard underground stems.

Key cormous plant families include Iridaceae, Colchicaceae, Musaceae and some Cyperaceae



Fig. 2



# Planting with Bulbs – Rhizome, Corm or Tuber – Does it matter?

Fig. 3



**Tubers** are modified lateral roots. Unlike bulbs and corms, they will send out roots from any point of their external surface such as Sweet Potato tubers (fig. 3). Other examples include Dahlias and Anemones. Tuber, in Latin, means 'swelling' and tubers can also refer to **tuberous stems** such as potatoes and yams. These are very thick rhizomes and may produce stolons so are capable of growing both stems and roots! Stem tubers often decrease significantly in size following rapid growth of leaves.

When growing bulbous plants, remember to allow them time to photosynthesise before cutting them back or pulling up the bulbs. Early flowering species such as Daffodils require some weeks after the flowers have finished to obtain energy before they will naturally allow their foliage to die back. Pulling up too early each year will cause stunted growth or even blind (non-flowering) stems. Bulbs may produce bulblets which can be planted separately. Likewise, rhizomes and others may multiply and will do better if they are split and thinned out once in a while. This can be great for the gardener as you will have new plants.

**Rhizomes**, also known as rootstalks, are the final sort of 'bulb' and are the least like a true bulb. They tend to be narrower than other storage organs and are simply a partially widened underground stem. Examples include Irises (fig. 4), Alstroemeria, many grasses and also members of the ginger family (Zingiberaceae).

Fig. 4





# 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

*Eranthis hyemalis*

Common English Name

Winter Aconite

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)

Species  
'Guinea Gold'

Mid Winter  
- Early Spring

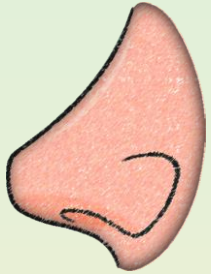
Ranunculaceae  
Buttercup Family

<1ft Tuberous



# 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

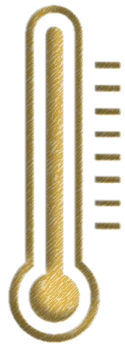
Some of the plants listed in our Top 200 are not fully hardy in all or some parts of the United Kingdom.

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:



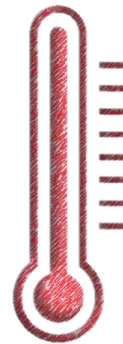
Almost Hardy  
**(H4)**



Half-Hardy  
**(H3)**



Not Frost Hardy  
**(H2)**



Not Hardy  
**(H1)**

## RHS Hardiness Scale

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



# Pollinators

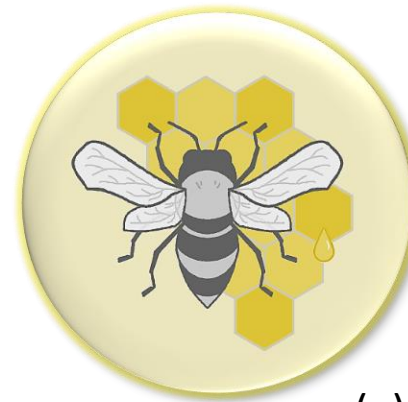
Our data on pollinators has been collected from studies spanning over a decade. Pollinator symbols appear when plants are proven to be good nectar plants for certain insects.

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

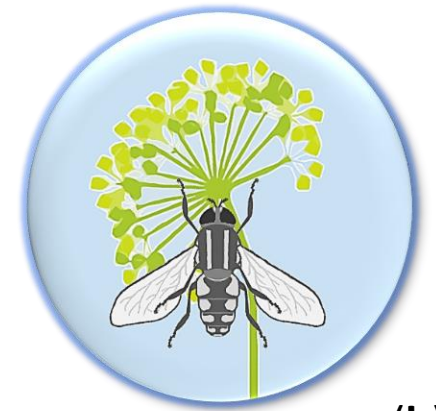
Our data spans a wide range of different insect species. For simplicity, these species have been condensed into six easy icons to represent them:

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

The next pages will describe each of the insect groups:



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)



(e)



(f)



# *Allium caeruleum*

## Blue-flowered Garlic



- Species -

Summer ☀

Amaryllidaceae  
Daffodil Family

3ft Bulbous



# *Allium hollandicum*

## Dutch Garlic, Persian Garlic



Summer ☀️

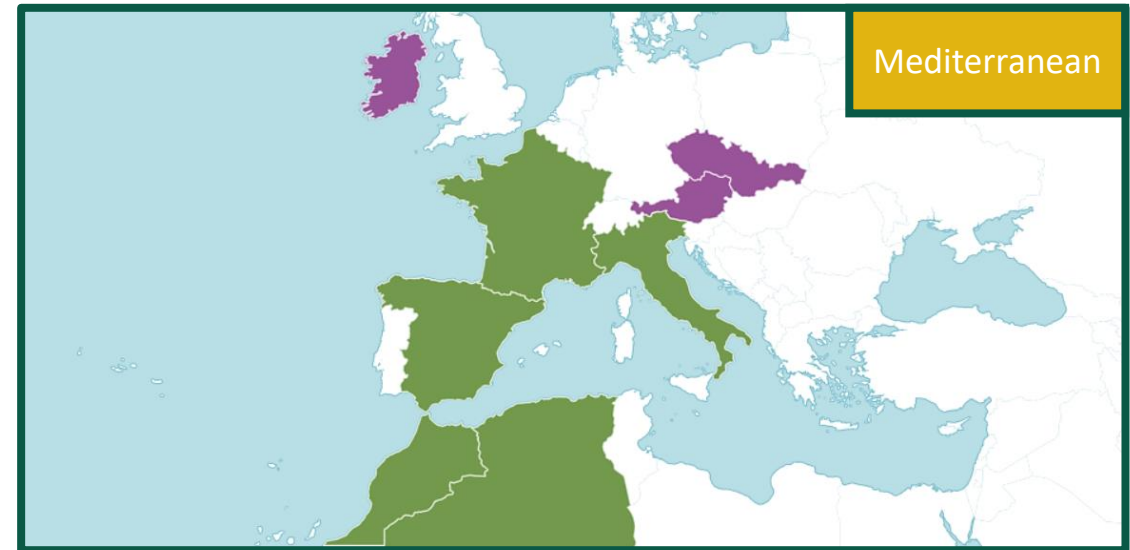
Amaryllidaceae  
Daffodil Family

3ft Bulbous



# *Allium moly*

## Yellow Garlic



# Allium schoenoprasum

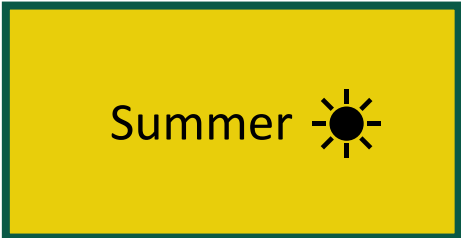
## Chives



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Jakub Cabal



None





# *Allium ursinum*

## Wild Garlic, Ramsons



None

Spring 

Amaryllidaceae  
Daffodil Family

2ft Bulbous





# *Alstroemeria x hybrida*

## Garden Peruvian-lily

*Complex group of hybrids of unknown parentage*





# *Anemone blanda*

## Balkan Windflower



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Dean Morley



- Species -  
'White Splendour'



Spring 

Ranunculaceae  
Buttercup Family

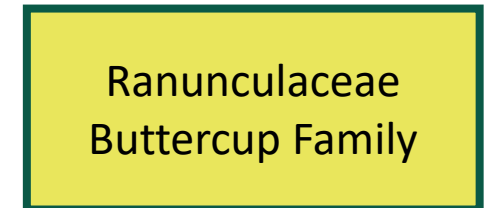
<1ft Tuberos

# *Anemone nemorosa*

## Wood Anemone



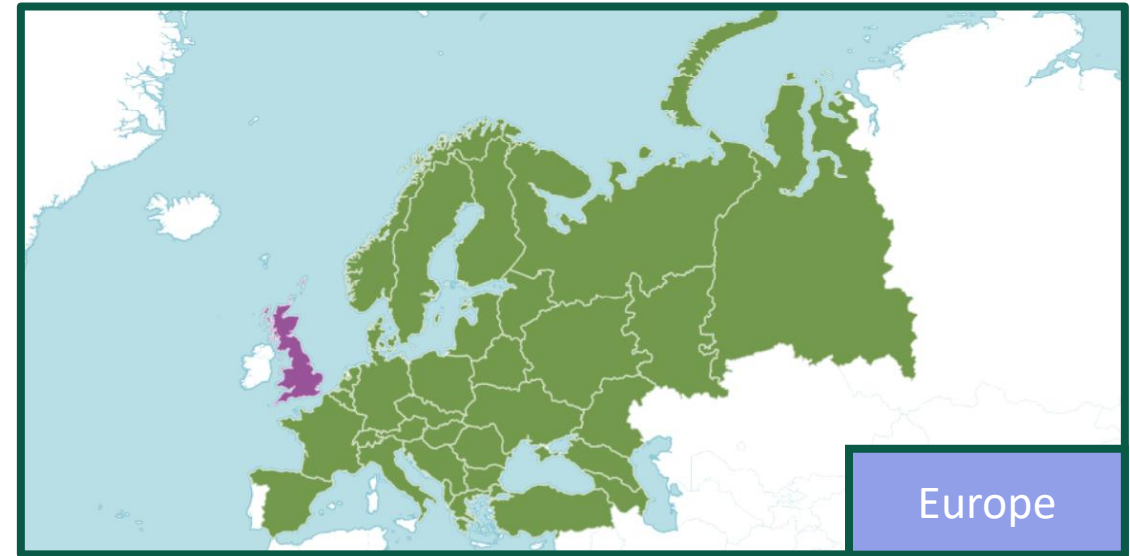
Photograph © Thomas McBride





# *Anemone ranunculoides*

## Buttercup Anemone



- Species -  
'Pleniflora'



Spring 

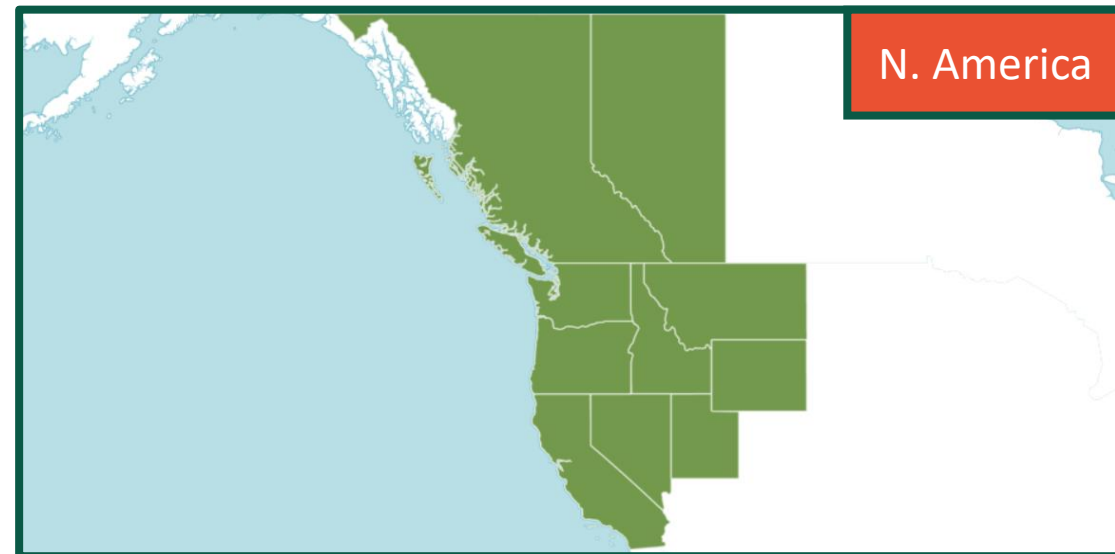
Ranunculaceae  
Buttercup Family

<1ft Tuberos



# *Camassia quamash*

## Common Camassia



None



Late Spring  
- Early Summer

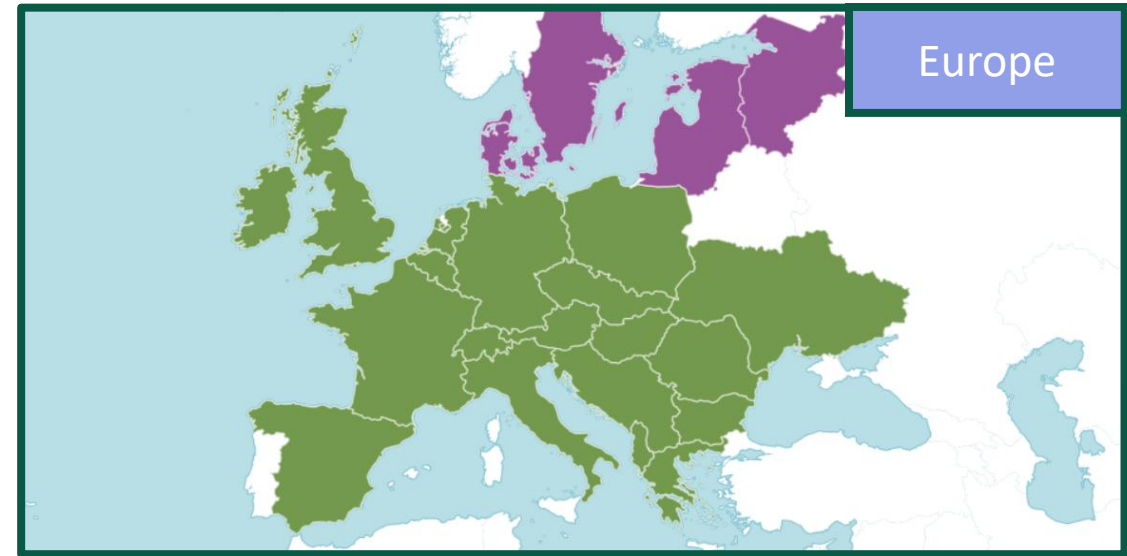
Asparagaceae  
Asparagus Family

3ft Bulbous

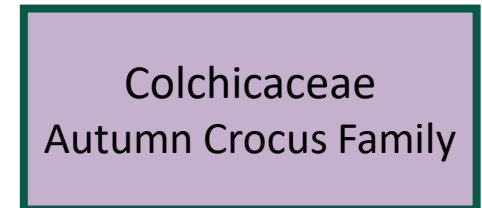


# *Colchicum autumnale*

## Autumn Crocus



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Bjorn S.



# *Convallaria majalis*

## Lily-of-the-Valley



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Todd Petit

'Fortin's Giant'  
-Species-



Spring 

Asparagaceae  
Asparagus Family

1ft Rhizomous



# *Crocus vernus*

## Spring Crocus



'Vanguard'



Spring 

Iridaceae  
Iris Family

<1ft Cormous

# *Crocus chrysanthus*

## Golden Crocus



'Cream Beauty'  
'Goldilocks'



Late Winter  
- Mid Spring

Iridaceae  
Iris Family

<1ft Cormous



# *Cyclamen coum*

## Eastern Sowbread



– Species –  
*Ssp. Coum*



Late Winter  
- Mid Spring

Primulaceae  
Primrose Family

<1ft Tuberos



# *Dahlia coccinea*

## Red Dahlia



*Photograph from Flickr (CC) Chipmunk\_1*



'Bishop of Llandaff'  
'Happy Single series'



Midsummer  
- Early Autumn

Asteraceae  
Daisy Family

3ft Tuberos Perennial

\* Will not survive a frost, only half-hardy, bring tubers indoors in winter to rest before planting in Spring



# *Dahlia imperialis*


## Tree Dahlia



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Chipmunk\_1



None



Summer ☀️

Asteraceae  
Daisy Family

6ft Tuberos Perennial

\* This plant will struggle to survive below -5°C night temperatures so plant in a sheltered spot and wrap the stems/mulch the base during the winter period.



# *Dierama pulcherrimum*

## Angel's Fishing Rod



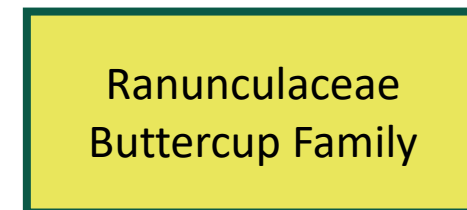
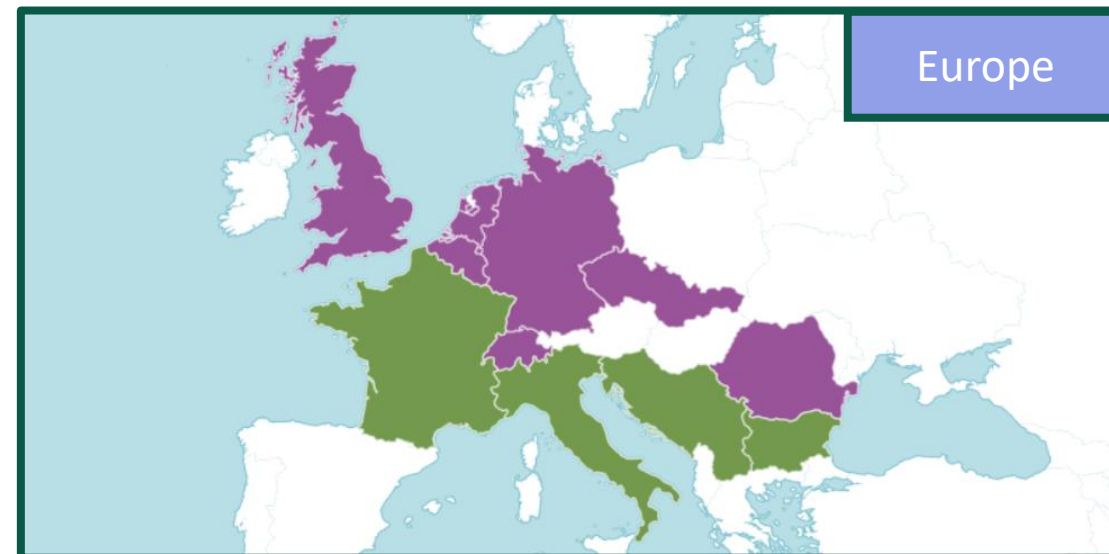


# *Eranthis hyemalis*

## Winter Aconite



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Peter Stenzel

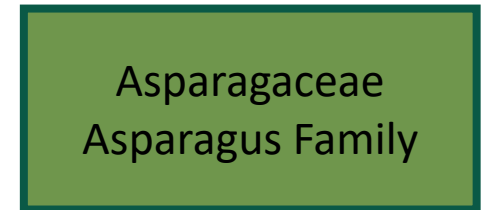


# *Eucomis autumnalis*

## Autumn Pineapple-lily



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Thistle Garden





# *Eucomis comosa*

## Common Pineapple-lily



'Sparkling  
Burgundy'



Early Summer  
- Early Autumn

Asparagaceae  
Asparagus Family

2ft Bulbous



# *Fritillaria imperialis*

## Crown Imperial



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Emma Patsie



- Species -

'Maxima Lutea'



Spring 

Liliaceae  
Lily Family

3ft Bulbous



# *Fritillaria meleagris*

## Snake's-head Fritillary



Photograph © Thomas McBride

- Species -  
*var. unicolor* 'Alba'



Spring 

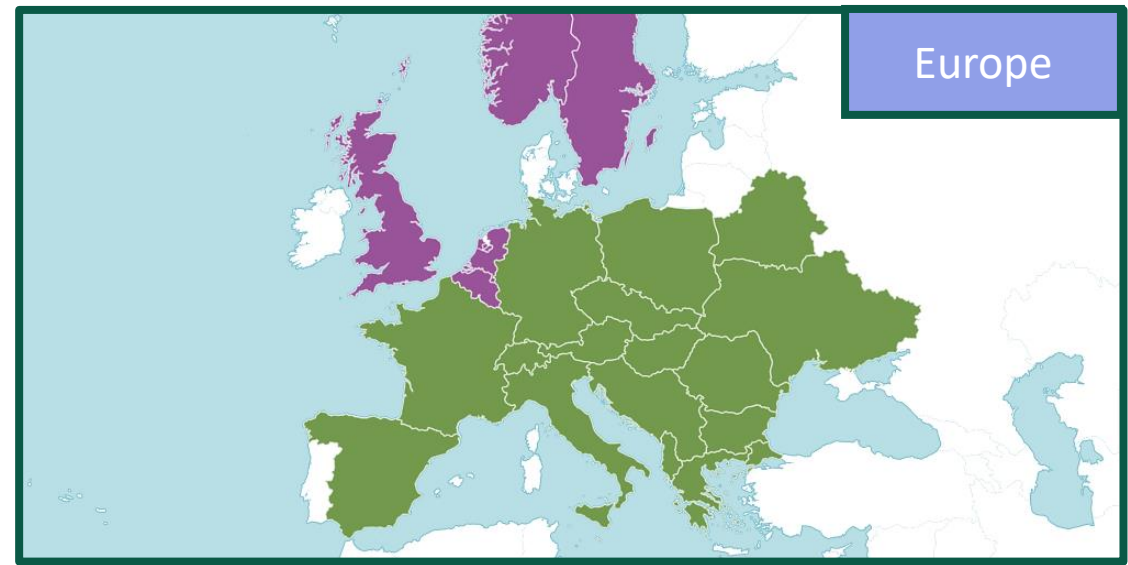
Liliaceae  
Lily Family

1ft Bulbous



# *Galanthus nivalis*

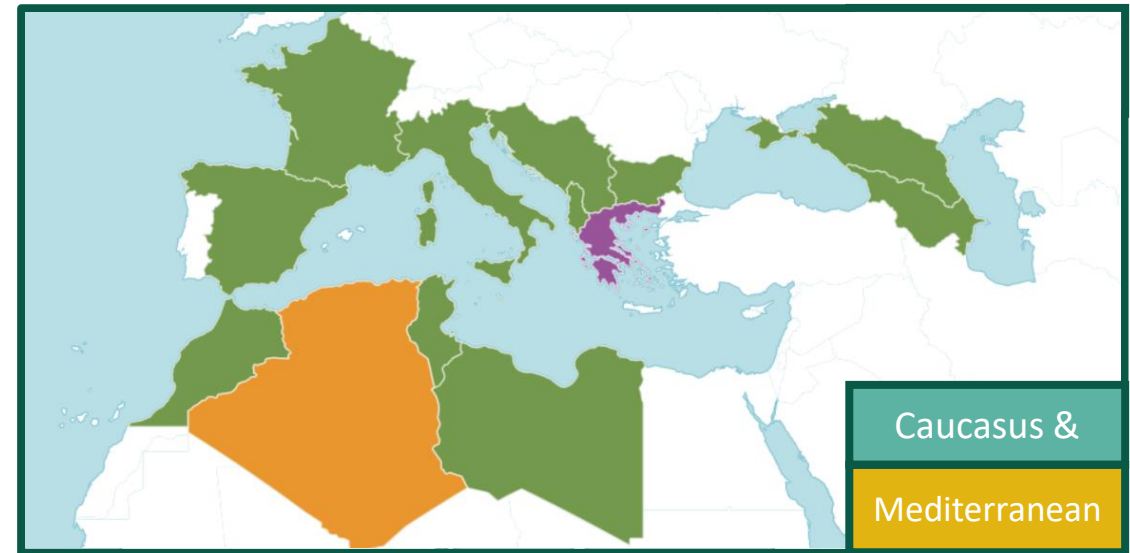
## Common Snowdrop





# *Gladiolus communis*

## Eastern Gladiolus



Subsp.  
byzantinus



Mid Spring  
- Early Summer

Iridaceae  
Iris Family

3ft Cormous

# *Hepatica nobilis*

## Common Liverleaf



- Species -



Spring 

Ranunculaceae  
Buttercup Family

1ft Rhizomous



# *Hosta sieboldiana* Syn. *H. fortunei*

## Giant Blue Plantain-lily



*Var. aureomarginata*  
'Frances Williams'



Summer ☀

Asparagaceae  
Asparagus Family

2ft Rhizomous

# *Hosta ventricosa*

## Blue Plantain-lily



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Gary Lerude



- Species -  
'Aureomarginata'



Summer ☀

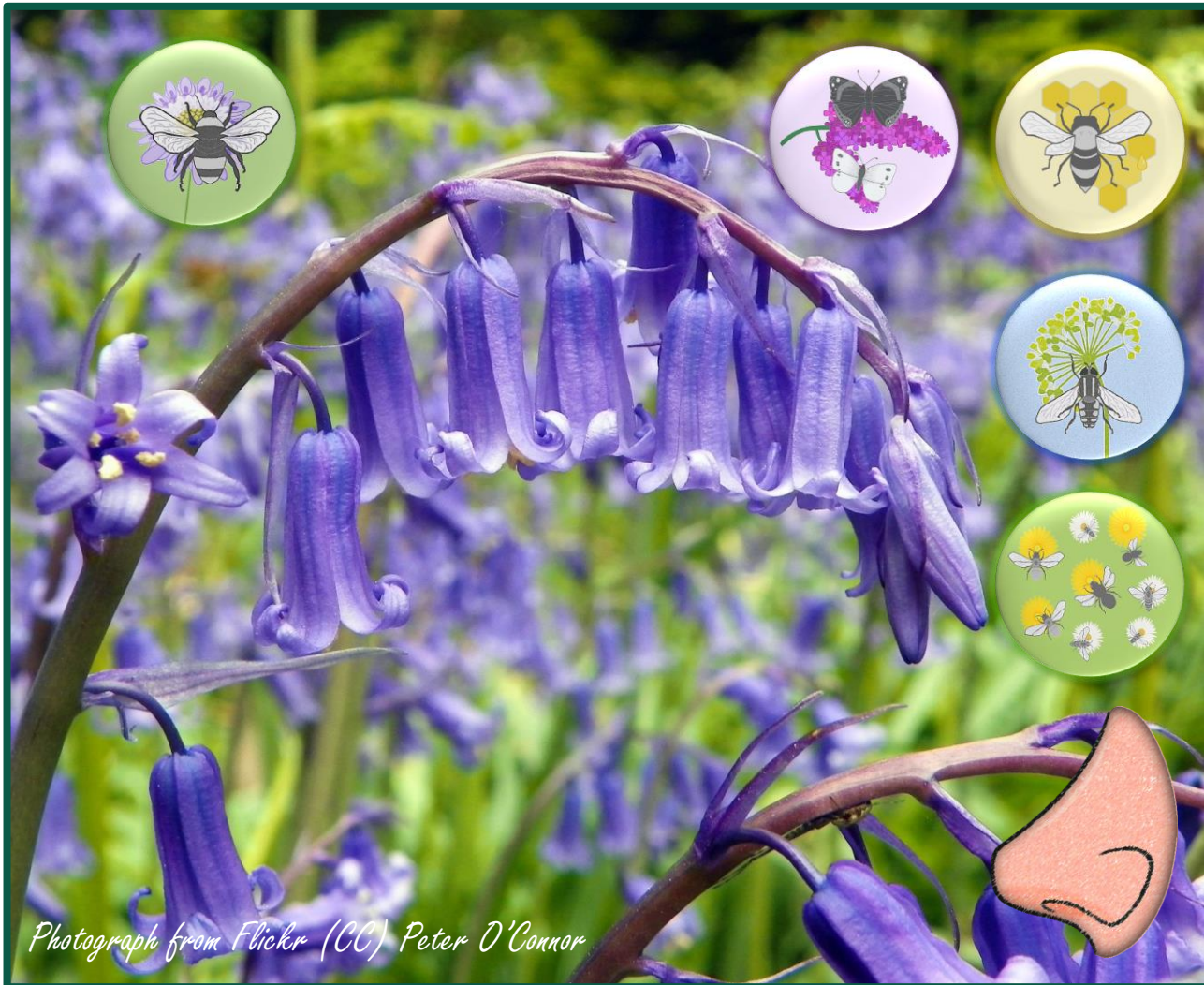
Asparagaceae  
Asparagus Family

2ft Perennial



# *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*

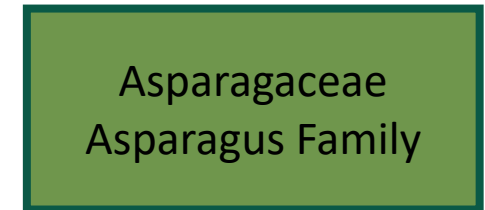
## English Bluebell



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Peter O'Connor



None





# *Hyacinthus orientalis*

## Garden Hyacinth



Photograph © Thomas McBride



Middle East

'Aida' 'Anna Marie'  
'Gypsy Queen'



Late Winter  
- Mid Spring

Asparagaceae  
Asparagus Family

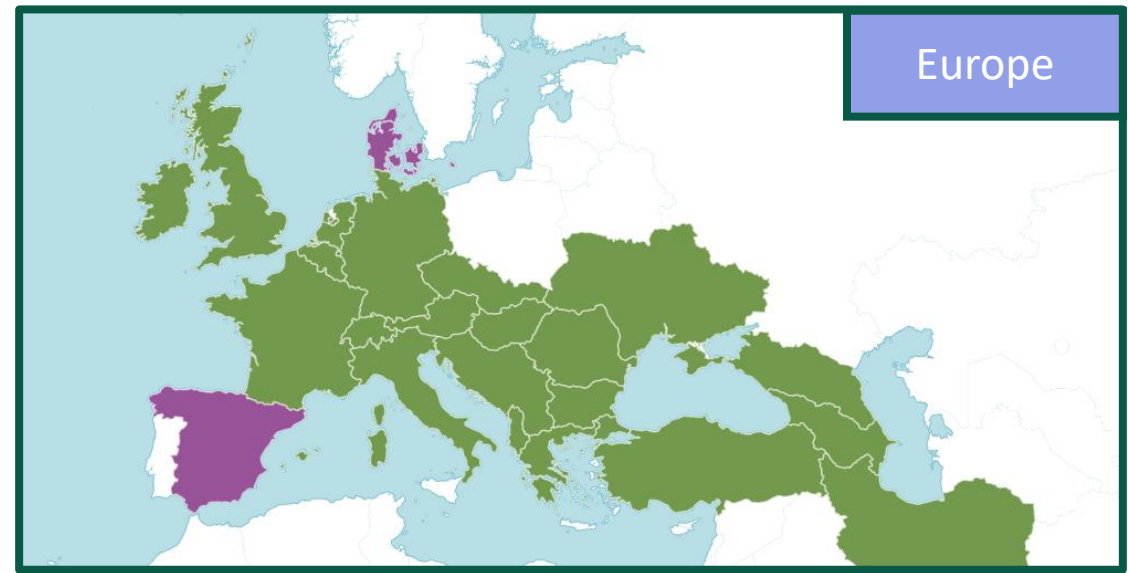
1ft Bulbous

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



# *Leucojum aestivum*

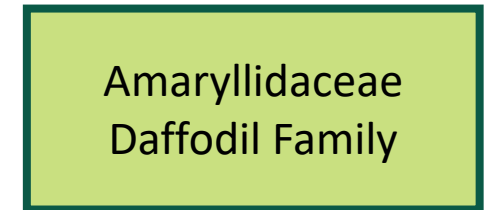
## Summer Snowflake



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Takashi Hososhima



'Gravetye Giant'

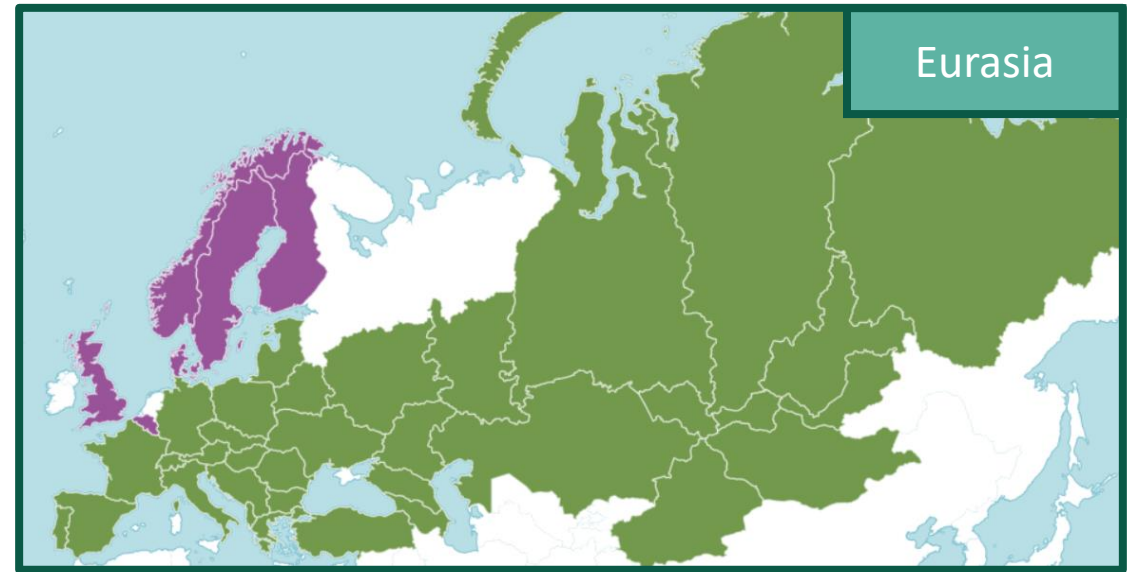


# *Lilium martagon*

## Turk's Cap Lily



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Ralf Wimmer



- Species -



Summer ☀

Liliaceae  
Lily Family

4ft Bulbous



# *Lilium regale*

## Regal Lily



- Species -



Summer ☀

Liliaceae  
Lily Family

6ft Bulbous

# *Muscari armeniacum*

## Garden Grape-Hyacinth



'Christmas Pearl'  
-Species-



Early Winter  
- Mid Spring

Asparagaceae  
Asparagus Family

1ft Bulbous



# *Muscari latifolium*

## Broad-leaved Grape-Hyacinth



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Josh Egan-Wyer



Anatolia

Iberia

-Species-



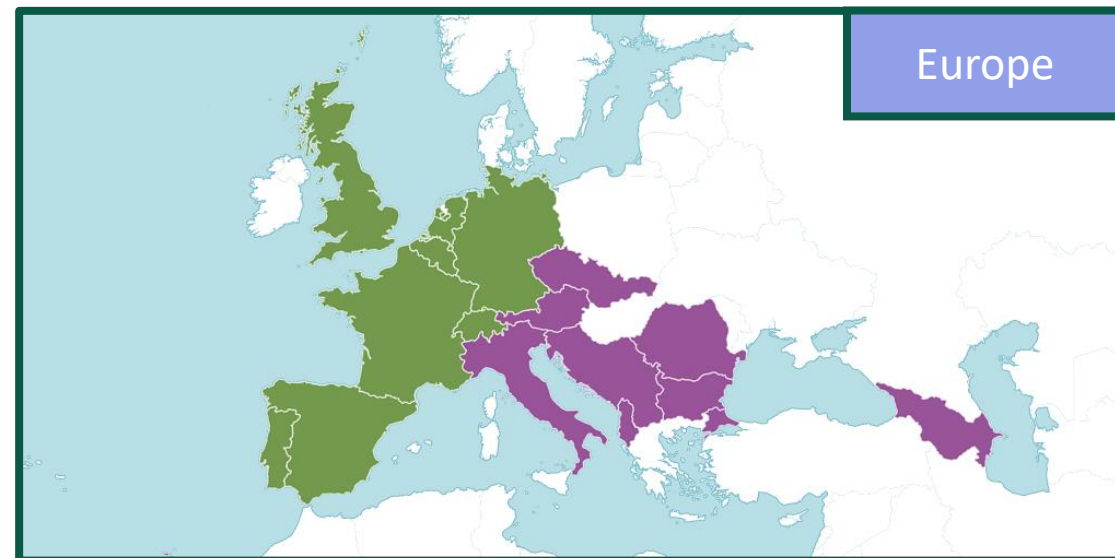
Spring 

Asparagaceae  
Asparagus Family

1ft Bulbous

# *Narcissus pseudonarcissus*

Wild Daffodil, Lent-lily



Europe



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Šarunas Burdulis

*Ssp. Pseudonarcissus*  
‘Dutch Master’



Late Winter  
- Mid Spring

Amaryllidaceae  
Daffodil Family

1ft Bulbous



# *Ornithogalum dubium*

## Orange Star-of-Bethlehem



Midwinter  
- Mid Spring

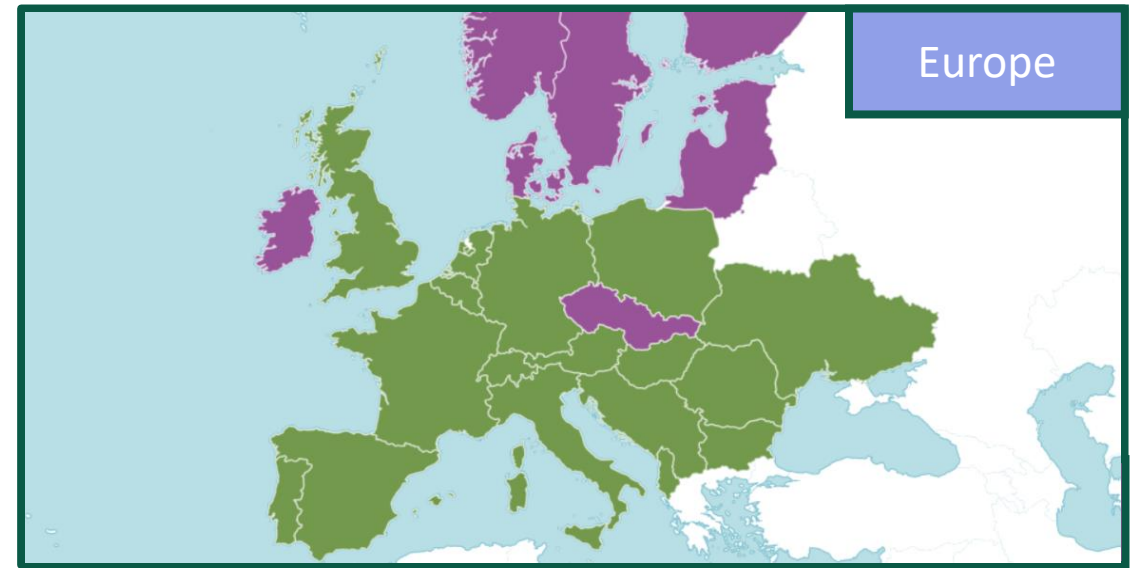
Asparagaceae  
Asparagus Family

1ft Bulbous

\* This plant will cannot survive below -2°c night temperatures so grow in a pot, bring outside during warmer days and keep in a sheltered, sunny position

# *Ornithogalum umbellatum*

## Garden Star-of-Bethlehem



Related Species:  
**O. nutans**

RHS AWARD OF GARDEN MERIT

Summer ☀

Asparagaceae  
Asparagus Family

1ft Bulbous



# *Oxalis adenophylla*

## Chilean Sour-clover



- Species -



Late Spring  
- Early Summer

Oxalidaceae  
Wood-sorrel Family

1ft Bulbous

# *Oxalis versicolor*

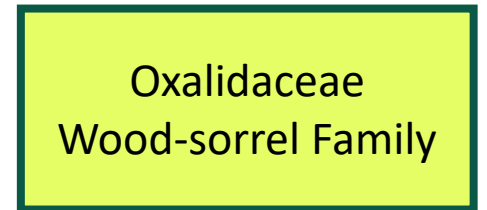
## Candy-cane Sorrel



Photograph from Wikipedia (CC) NZFauna



- Species -



\* This plant will cannot survive below -5°C night temperatures so bring indoors during the winter period. 40

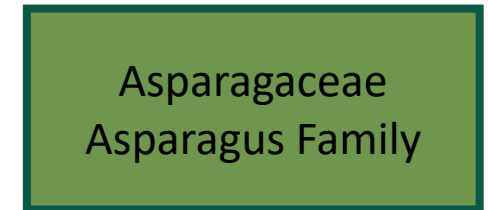


# *Polygonatum multiflorum*

## Solomon's Seal



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Kerry Woods



# *Pulsatilla vulgaris*

## Common Pasqueflower



-Species-



Spring 

Ranunculaceae  
Buttercup Family

1ft Rhizomous



# *Puschkinia scilloides*

## Lebanon Squill



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Ingeborg van Leeuwen



*var. libanotica*



Spring 

Asparagaceae  
Asparagus Family

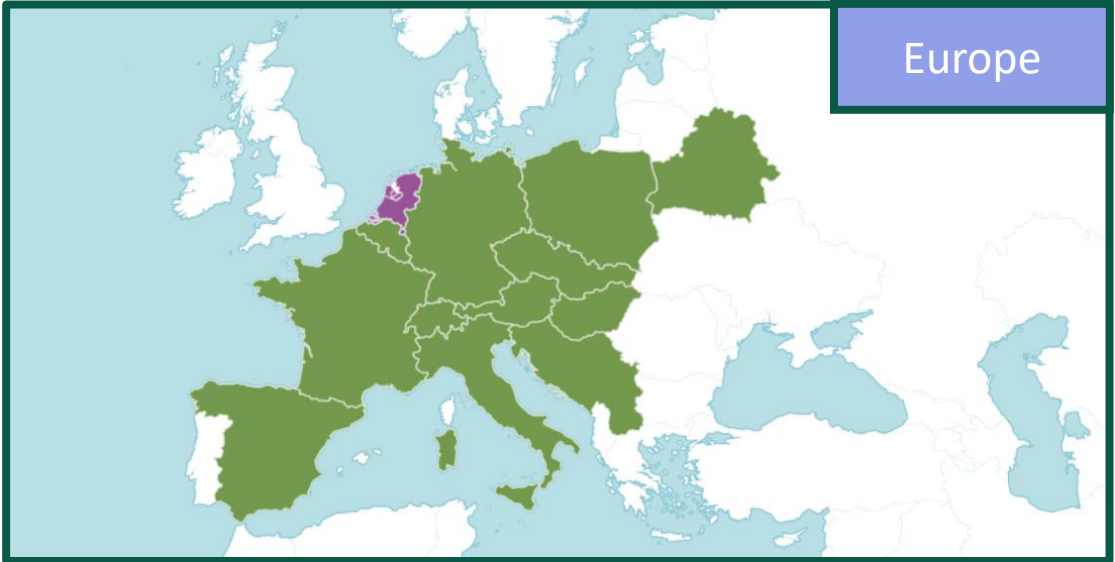
<1ft Bulbous

# *Scilla bifolia*

## Alpine Squill



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Katya Unchik



Europe



-Species-

Late Winter  
- Early Spring

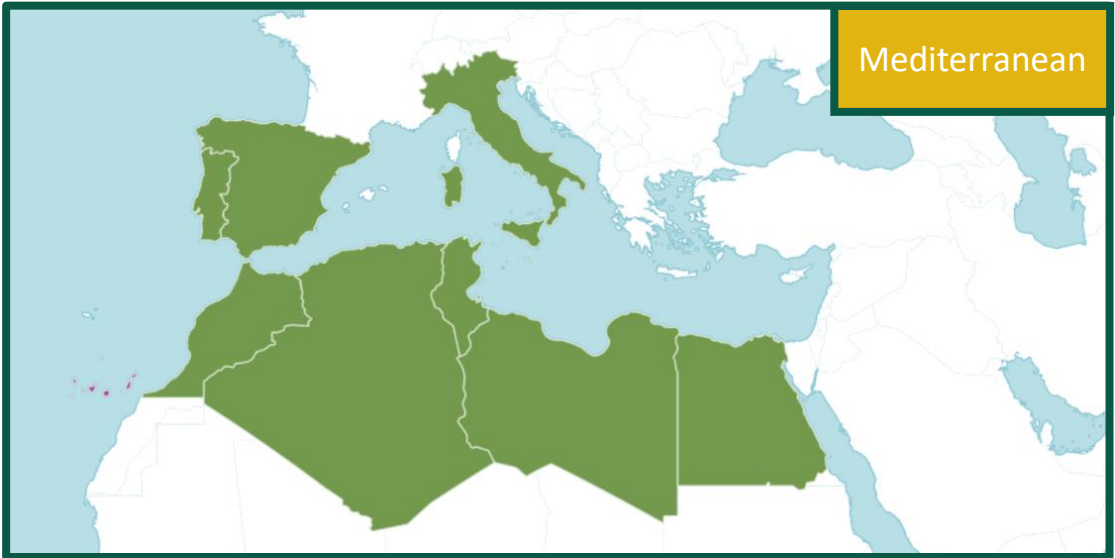
Asparagaceae  
Asparagus Family

<1ft Bulbous



# *Scilla peruviana*

## Portuguese Squill



None

RHS AWARD OF GARDEN MERIT

Summer ☀️

Asparagaceae  
Asparagus Family

1ft Bulbous

# *Scilla siberica*

## Wood Squill



-Species-

Late Winter  
- Early Spring

Asparagaceae  
Asparagus Family

<1ft Bulbous

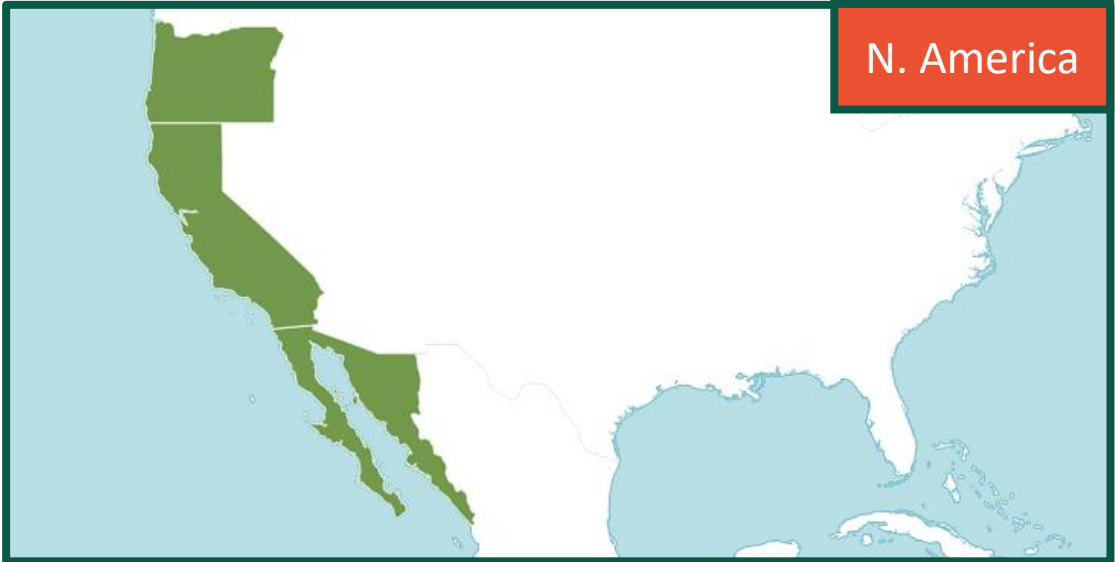


# *Sisyrinchium bellum*

## Californian Blue-eyed Grass



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Cliff Hutson



Similar Species:

*S. Idahoense* var. *macounii* 'Album'



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.

Mid Spring  
- Early Summer

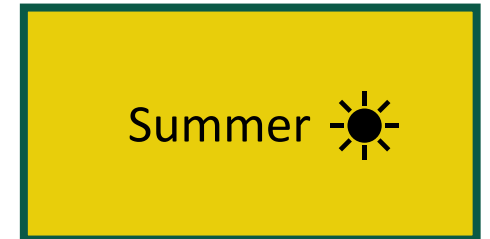
Iridaceae  
Iris Family

2ft Rhizomous



# *Sisyrinchium striatum*

## Satin Flower





# *Tricyrtis formosana*

## Taiwanese Toad Lily



Taiwan

None

Autumn 

Liliaceae  
Lily Family

3ft Rhizomous




# *Tulipa gesneriana*

## Garden Tulip



Hundreds of  
Cultivars



Spring 

Liliaceae  
Lily Family

2ft Bulbous



# *Tulipa saxatilis*

Candia Tulip



'Lilac Wonder'



Spring 

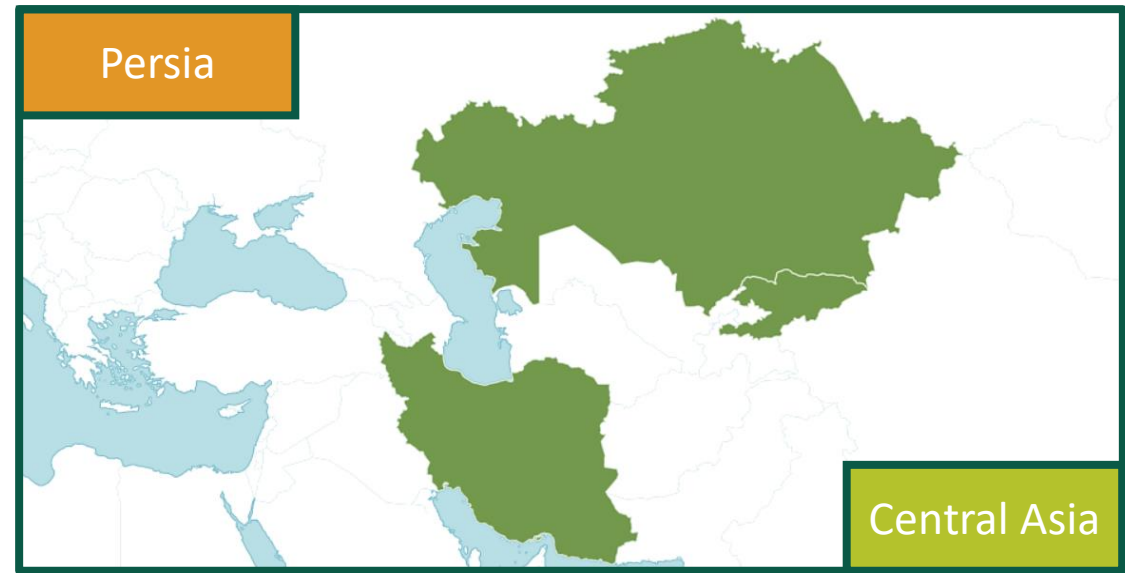
Liliaceae  
Lily Family

2ft Bulbous



# *Tulipa urumiensis*

Late Tulip



- Species -  
'Tarda'



Spring 

Liliaceae  
Lily Family

1ft Bulbous