



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Pincushion Flower: Love at First Sight! (June 21, 2025)

By Tulare/Kings Counties Master Gardeners

Love at first sight! The most common *Scabiosa* found in local nurseries has lavender-blue flowers and a ferny leaf. *Scabiosa* is a perfect addition to your summer garden, as using flowers in cool color palettes, such as blues, purples, pinks, and white, can create a sense of calm and visual coolness in your garden, especially during the hot summer months.

Scabiosa's common name is "Pincushion flower," as the center resembles a pincushion and the stamens in the center resembles tiny pins. Pronounced scab-ee-OH-sah, the flower language states this plant symbolizes love, purity and peace.

They are one of those old-fashioned, free-flowering plants right at home in a cottage-type garden. The flowers are prized as a cut flower and are easy to grow in well drained, sunny positions, although in our hot Valley sun, they might prefer some afternoon shade. Delicate-appearing and full of charm, with large flower heads atop long, wiry stem, they add special colorful movement as garden plants. *Scabiosa* flowers are excellent cutting flowers for arrangements as a filler or on their own in your vase.

Description

Scabiosa columbaria 'Butterfly Blue' is one of the most popular cultivars. The family *Caprifoliaceae* contains the genus *Scabiosa*, as well as other ornamental flowers like honeysuckle and weigela. *Scabiosa* is a small evergreen plant, so it's best to use them in masses to prevent them from being obscured by taller species. They are ideal for informal mixed border plantings where they are often seen with butterflies swarming around their blossoms.

They have 2" flowers on neat foliage, so it is also possible to use them alone to form a border along the edge of a path or lawn. The flower stems raise 12-15" high to allow these beauties to dance in any breeze. Because of its diminutive nature, *Scabiosa* can even be a rock garden plant. Though it really starts to put on a show in May, they can bloom all summer, and sporadically throughout all a mild winter.

Care

Scabiosa are easily grown in average, medium, well-drained soil in full sun. It appreciates part afternoon shade, particularly in the hot summer climates of our central valley. Prefers light soils with neutral pH. Intolerant of wet soils, especially in winter. Remove spent flowers to encourage additional bloom.

Mature plants are about a foot in diameter and 3 inches tall. These lovelies may produce 20 to 50 blooms, each held individually on thin stems. When in bloom, the plants average an airy foot in height.

Provide pincushion flowers with an inch of water while they're establishing their root systems. After that, the plants can tolerate periods of drought. Since deadheading is laborious on plants that have so many small flowers on individual stems, you can shear the plant in midsummer when the blossom output is low to encourage a new flush of blooms in early fall. Pincushion flowers are light feeders; a bimonthly feeding with a balanced fertilizer like worm castings during the growing season will keep the flowers coming.

Every few years, it's helpful to divide established patches of *Scabiosa*. Dig out six-inch clumps with a spade and transplant them to a new location. Fill in the holes left with fresh planting soil, so the remaining plants can grow into it. If you have hard heavy soil, don't fight it; make pincushion flowers the star of your garden by edging your rock garden or perennial flower border with alternating pink, white, and blue pincushion flower plants.

Pests

Scabiosa is not bothered by pests or disease, except in the case of plants weak from being planted in too much shade or in an area with poor drainage. Then watch for aphids and whiteflies. Powdery mildew may occur.



If you need an easy lavender-blue flower to pop against orange or yellow companion flowers like coreopsis or lantana, try 'Butterfly Blue' Scabiosa or . Other colors to look for include Black Knight--a burgundy flower with white stamens that are very striking paired with green or white flowering companions; or Pink Mist, with clear pink flowers that look feminine in a fairy garden.

One of the many virtues of the plant is that it is even resistant to being browsed by deer. With such a wide range of colors to choose from and virtually nothing to worry about in terms of pests and disease, it's hard to go wrong with Scabiosa. They also make a long-lasting cut flower--a great way to show your feelings to someone special.

Questions? Call the Master Gardeners:

Tulare County: (559) 684-3325, Tues & Thurs, 9:30-11:30;

Kings County: (559) 852-2736, Thursday Only, 9:30-11:30 a.m

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