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# How to Grow Sweet Alyssum: The Complete Guide



Photo Credit: O. Lyzhechka

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# Planting, Growing, and Caring for Lobularia Maritima

By [Andy Wilcox](#)

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Sweet alyssum is a pretty flowering plant that forms a low-spreading mound with tiny, sweet-smelling blooms throughout the growing season. It's pollinator-friendly and commonly used as a seasonal ground cover or annual bedding flower. Learn how to plant, grow, and care for sweet alyssum.

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Sweet alyssums (*Lobularia maritima*) are commonly treated as annual plants in most of North America, even though they are perennials in their native Mediterranean climate. In Zones 9 to 11, they can be grown as tender perennials, which means that they won't survive frost. ([Check your updated zone here](#)).

Sweet alyssum is considered a cool-weather bloomer. It often displays blooms in spring, takes a break in hot weather, and reblooms in early autumn as the daytime highs begin to come down.

The flowers are typically white, four-petaled, and small, growing in clusters called "racemes." They can also be lavender or purple in color. With their honey-like fragrance, alyssum is loved by the smaller pollinators, and their nectar is easily accessible to beneficial insects.

## ADVERTISEMENT



Sweet Alyssum (*Lobularia maritima*)  
with purple blooms. Credit: Nick  
Pecker

These plants are easy to start from seed and are also commonly available in flats or six-packs in garden centers in springtime. Usually reaching only 3 to 9 inches high but sprawling as far as 2 to 3 feet wide, they'll gently spread out and provide a flowering, three-dimensional carpet that is much more interesting than bagged mulch. Some varieties will spread quite willingly and can be used at the edge of paths to spill over paving stones or fill in stony crevices—or as the spiller in a traditional thriller-filler-spiller



Lavender sweet alyssum flower planted as ground cover. Credit: EllaSt

\*\*\*Sweet alyssum is considered an invasive species in California. It can rapidly take off and spread in frost-free areas, so check with your state before planting if you live in an area without winter freezing temps.\*\*\*

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- [How to Grow Heliotropes: The Complete Guide](#)
- [How to Grow Ranunculus: The Complete Guide](#)
- [How to Grow Bellflowers: The Complete Guide to Campanula](#)

## PLANTING

Sweet alyssum blooms and spreads best in

hotter portions of its range. It tolerates sandy or rocky conditions and does best with a neutral or slightly acidic pH. Avoid soggy locations. Young plants are not frost-tolerant, but mature plants will tolerate a light frost without damage.

One or two plants are enough to provide interest in a container, but when planting sweet alyssum in a garden bed, go for the more-is-better look. They'll happily crowd together and make a thick layer of foliage and blooms, and the carpet of color is worth a bit of extra work in spring.

## When to Plant Sweet Alyssum

When planting nursery-started plants, wait until after the last frost has passed. Remember to harden them off if needed. Sweet alyssum can also be started from seed indoors at home for transplanting.

If you start sweet alyssum seeds indoors,

60°F, sweet alyssum can be directly seeded in the garden.

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## How to Plant Sweet Alyssum

Sweet alyssum is commonly purchased in flats or packs of small plants from a garden center or nursery, although they are also easy to start from seed. To transplant sweet alyssum, follow these steps.

1. Water the plugs or flats several hours before transplanting to reduce

plant stress

Any high-quality potting soil is fine for container growing.

3. For larger plantings, remove the sweet alyssum plants from their containers and set them out where they'll be planted, spacing them 8 to 12 inches apart. Pre-arranging before planting will allow you to space them for better coverage and avoid leaving gaps as you finish. You can also play with colors and patterns.
4. Use a hand trowel and dig a small hole as deep as the plug and a bit wider. Loosen the soil at the bottom.
5. Set the plug or plant in the hole, check the depth, and refill the hole, firming the soil around the roots as you go.
6. Grab the hose and give them a good soaking.
7. Add mulch to keep weeds down and soil moisture up while the plants get established. Use natural mulch that will decompose quickly, such as shredded straw, pine needles, or grass clippings.

Sow them in spring once the soil has thawed, about 2 to 3 weeks before your last frost. The seeds need light to germinate, but they will do better if gently pressed into the soil for good seed-to-soil contact.

If bird predation is an issue, dust the area with a thin layer of vermiculite or finely shredded straw. The layer should be thin enough that some light still gets through.



*Sweet alyssum and other annuals in a hollowed tree trunk. Dolomites, Italy. Credit: Stefan\_Sutka*

## GROWING

Sweet alyssum likes evenly moist soil and supplemental watering in dry periods. While it will tolerate a bit of drought, growth and flowering will be affected.

expense of flowering. Compost worked into the soil in spring will likely be sufficient.



White sweet alyssum in flower.

Credit: Alex Manders

While deadheading encourages more blooms, it can be daunting if you have a larger ground cover. planting of sweet alyssum.

- For single plants in a container, just nip off the spent blooms.
- In larger plantings, give the entire grouping a haircut with a hedge trimmer or other similar tool. Take off the top third of the plant when you notice many blooms are tired or the plant is getting leggy. You'll encourage bushier growth and accomplish deadheading

- ‘Pastel Carpet’ provides a flowing border of color in large plantings. Its blooms are light shades of cream, pink, rose, and purple. This variety reaches about nine inches high and spreads to about a foot in diameter, so plant it closer together.
- ‘Rosie O’Day’ is an AAS winner for bedding plants. Its smaller stature—only six inches high and spreading to about a foot wide—makes it perfect for providing lovely purple features in containers and planters.
- ‘Carpet of Snow’ gives you an idea of how many blossoms this variety produces. A bit hardier than most, it is rated for USDA Zone 7. Plant en masse for easy ground cover. You can start from seed.

[See 10 of our favorite ground cover plants.](#)



lavendar. Photo credit: Y.Yuize

## GARDENING PRODUCTS



## PESTS/DISEASES

- Stem and root rot from soggy soil conditions
- Downy mildew

## WIT AND WISDOM

- Sweet alyssum gets its common name from the genus *Alyssum*, to which it formerly belonged. *Alyssum* translates

referring to the historical belief that the plant could cure rabies.

- Plant sweet alyssum among your tulips and daffodils to fill the area with color in summer after the spring-flowering bulbs have gone dormant.

## FLOWERS

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Andy Wilcox



Andy Wilcox is a flower farmer and master gardener with a passion for soil health, small producers, forestry, and horticulture.

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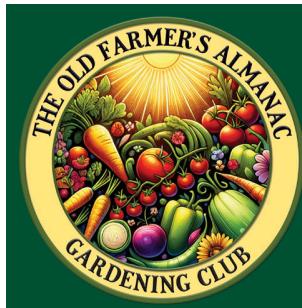
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