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How to Grow Blanket Flowers (*Gaillardia*)



Gaillardia x grandiflora has distinctive two-tone sunset colors, bright patterns, and toothed petals.

Photo Credit: Mikhail Pashchenko

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Planting, Growing, and Caring for Blanket Flowers

By [Andy Wilcox](#)

Last Updated: March 12, 2025



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Native blanket flowers (*Gaillardia*) bloom heavily, blanketing the ground with brightly patterned sunset colors. Heat- and drought-tolerant, they aren't picky about soil conditions. Plus, blanket flowers are beloved by butterflies, bees, and other pollinators. Learn how to grow these natural beauties.

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Gaillardia, commonly called blanket flowers, is part of the daisy (Asteraceae) family, so it's no surprise that they look like big daisy-like flowers. They're often two-toned in shades of red, yellow, gold, and vivid oranges, resembling a Native American blanket.

They are native to much of North America and can be found as wildflowers in prairie habitats. While originating in the western states and the Great Plains, blanket flowers are cold-hardy to USDA Zones 3 to 9 and are excellent for dry, hot gardens as they don't need much water.

Most *Gaillardia* varieties are both annual and perennial types. *Gaillardia pulchella* is a relatively common annual, and *G. aristata* is a short-lived perennial. The most common type in home gardens is *Gaillardia x grandiflora*, which tends to be a short-lived perennial in most regions.

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Gaillardia x grandiflora in 'Kobold'
grow profusely. Perfect as a border in
a country cottage garden. Credit
Peter Turner

Gaillardia blooms in early summer and keeps flowering profusely all summer long. In autumn, the flowers—if not dead-headed—become golfball-shaped seed heads favored by goldfinches. They are a favorite of bees and other pollinators and are often used by butterflies.

They are moderately deer-resistant or, at least, get nibbled less often than most other plants. Most Gaillardia are cold hardy and will survive to -20°F with

lished, these native wildflowers require very little care.

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PLANTING

Blanket flowers thrive in sun. They aren't picky about pH and will do well in dry, less fertile conditions but can't handle wet sites. Excellent drainage is the most crucial factor when considering soil. Gaillardia doesn't spread by vegetative means but often self-seed to fill an area.

When to Plant Gaillardia

Small plants purchased from the garden center can be hardened off and planted outside once the frosts are finished in spring.

Warm-climate gardeners can also plant perennial blanket flowers by seed in fall.

Wait to sow outdoors until the soil has warmed enough to plant sweet corn and tomatoes. Like many perennials, some Gaillardia planted from seed will not flower the first year, while other varieties will.

How to Plant Gaillardia

Gaillardia is quite easy to transplant and can also be started from seed indoors or directly sown in the garden. Here's how to do it.

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While Gaillardia are cold-hardy, wait to plant them outside in spring until the last frosts have passed.

- Loosen the soil and plant them like other transplants, freeing any circling roots and digging a hole twice the size of the rootball.
- Apply light pressure when replacing the soil to remove any air pockets.
- Water deeply immediately after planting.
- No fertilizer is needed, but a layer of mulch will help to keep the weeds down and the soil surface loose and uncrusted.
- Space plants about 12 inches apart.

To start Gaillardia from seed:

Gaillardia can be started from seed, either indoors 4-6 weeks before your last frost or outdoors directly in the soil after the last spring frost has passed.

If starting indoors:

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- Premoisten seed starting mix and sow 2–3 seeds per small container or 1–2 seeds per cell in a cell tray, sowing $\frac{1}{8}$ inches deep.
- Cover the tray or pot with a humidity dome or plastic wrap and place it in a warm, well-lit location. They should pop up in 2–3 weeks.
- Once seedlings have emerged, remove the humidity dome, provide 12–16 hours of light per day, and keep the soil barely moist.
- Harden off seedlings before transplanting outdoors.

To sow blanket flowers directly into the flower bed:

- Wait until the soil has warmed, about

- Prepare the seedbed by loosening the soil and raking smooth.
- Scatter seeds on the surface. Lightly cover with a dusting of soil and water gently but well.
- The thinnest layer of straw mulch can help keep the soil surface from drying out and crusting while not being much of a barrier for the little seedlings.

GROWING

Blanket flowers are in the category of “easy” to grow flowers. Being drought-tolerant, they won’t need much care from you to do well, so they’re a perfect choice for a harder-to-reach area.

How to Grow Gaillardia

Water newly planted or sprouted Gaillardia when the soil feels dry an inch down, tested with your finger. After a month or two, when they’re established, ~~back the watering frequency down and~~

from mulch to keep the weeds down, especially during the first year. In later years, they may close off the canopy and provide their own living mulch.

Deadheading blanket flowers will help encourage further blooms. If in a container on the deck, nip off spent blooms at the first leaf node weekly. For larger plantings in the garden, use hedge shears to give them a quick haircut and deadhead many spent blooms at once. Otherwise, leave flowers to become seedheads for an autumn bird attraction.

As most *Gaillardia* varieties are cold-hardy to USDA Zones 3–9 or 4–9, leave the old growth intact over winter to provide insect habitat. Then prune them down to about 2–3 inches above ground in early spring. If you live in the colder regions of their area, a 3–4 inch thick layer of mulch in late fall can help with overwintering. Remove the mulch in spring and apply a fresh, non-soggy layer.

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Types

When shopping for blanket flowers, remember that *G. pulchella* is an annual.

Gaillardia x grandiflora or *G. aristata* are perennials.

- *Gaillardia x grandiflora* ‘Arizona Sun’ is a perennial in the classic gold and burgundy bicolor pattern. It is very heat tolerant and cold hardy in USDA Zones 3–9, typically reaching a foot tall and 2 feet wide.
- *Gaillardia aristata* ‘SpinTop Red’ is another perennial with a shorter stature at about 10 inches tall. Loads of rusty red blooms with dark centers and good drought tolerance make this an excellent choice for a window box.

petals. It is an annual but commonly self-seeds (if allowed to).

- ‘Golden Beauty’ is a unique Gaillardia hybrid, a taller form and fully double flowers that look like golden-yellow pom-poms. It’s an annual.



Pollination of red and yellow flowers of *Gaillardia aristata* in June. Credit APugach

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These plucky plants are not often bothered by disease or pests, but can be affected by the following:

- Aster yellows
- Aphids
- Root rots
- Powdery mildew

WIT AND WISDOM

- The origins of the common name of blanket flowers are uncertain. It may be inspired by the plant's ability to create a carpet of foliage and flowers in its native habitat.
- Plan ahead when choosing a spot for blanket flowers. If your perennial bed is irrigated with a drip line, soaker hose, or overhead sprinkler, plant these flowers at the edge of the sprinkler pattern or a bit removed from the drip line. While some moisture is welcome for all plants, these drought-tolerant flowers won't like frequent watering and wet conditions.
- Gaillardia are short-lived perennials

new divisions, of course. Either early spring or autumn is fine for dividing, but in autumn, do so in time for the plants to put down new roots before the ground freezes.

FLOWERS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

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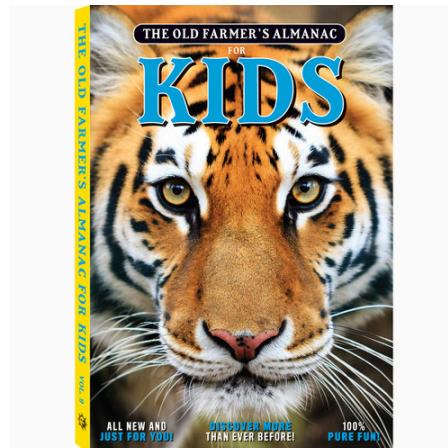
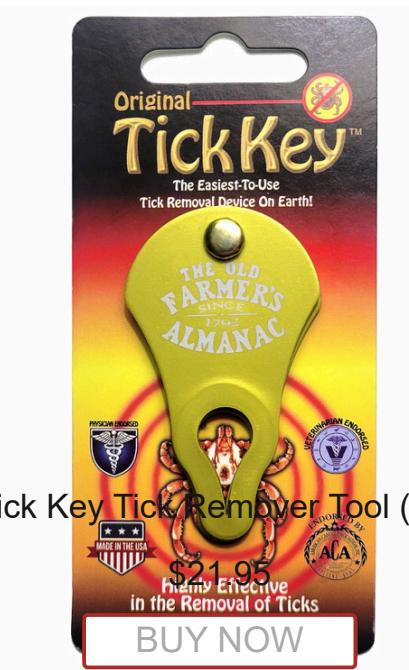
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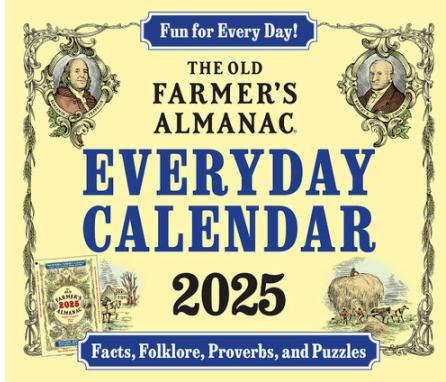
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