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How to Grow Wallflowers



Photo Credit: Kolinchev Andrii

Botanical Name:
Erysimum spp.

Plant Type:
Flower

Sun Exposure:
Full Sun, Part Sun

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Learn How to Plant, Grow, and

By [Andy Wilcox](#)**Last Updated:** August 16, 2024

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The old saying about being a shy wallflower at a party doesn't fit these flowers as they stand out anywhere you plant them. Need a plant that grows in poor soil? Check. Has bright-colored blooms? Check. Tolerates neglect? Check. Beloved by pollinators? Check. Discover how to plant, grow, and care for colorful wallflowers.

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About Wallflowers

Wallflowers belong to the genus

America. Some more commonly bred and grown wallflowers include the alpine wallflower, *E. linifolium*, and *Erysimum cheiri*.

The name, wallflower, originated from the fact that these plants were often seen on old walls or cliffs. In the Middle Ages, the flowers were carried in small bouquets to festivals and events.

Wallflowers will bloom for many months, from spring to mid-summer. Some last even longer. *Erysimum* 'Bowles's Mauve' can flower up to 9 months! They can grow from 6 to 24 inches tall, and the star-shaped, 4-petaled flowers are about 3/4-inch wide, growing in clusters.

Typically, the flowers are orange-yellow, a bright yellow, or butterscotch, but also come in pinks and purples, and can even appear to shimmer in a reddish-purple to burgundy. Many types are also fragrant, and beloved by hummingbirds and pollinators. They are deer- and drought-resistant and make great cut flowers.

Wallflowers' foliage is long, slender, and pointed, similar to flax leaves. While most plants display dark green foliage, variegated varieties are on the market.



Common wallflower's botanical name is Erysimum cheiri. Credit: Vorachith.

Do Wallflowers Return Every Year?

Wallflowers are low-growing mounding perennials or biennials but are commonly

due to reseeding. They can also get leggy if not pruned.

Most types do lose their foliage and die back every year when grown in regions cooler than USDA Zone 8, though. There are newer cultivars that are hardy in zones as low as zone 5.

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To extend the life of wallflowers, it's important to give their foliage a trim mid-summer and keep them compact. If they get overgrown, cut back the stems to the base.

flower border. Because wallflowers love stony, well-drained soil—they are perfect for rock gardens. Or, plant in containers.

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PLANTING

When to Plant Wallflowers

Wallflower seeds can be planted in early spring after the last frosts and will bloom late spring to mid-summer. Or, they can be planted in the fall, when the spring-flowering bulbs go into the ground, for blooms in the following spring.

If planting in autumn, try to get them in the ground at least 4 to 6 weeks before

Where to Plant Wallflowers

Wallflowers like [full to partial sun](#) in most locations. They're fine in full sun in the northern areas of their hardiness range and will prefer afternoon shade in the hotter portions. If planting them in the ground, excellent drainage is key. They're perfectly happy in scrappy, low-fertility soil. Imagine the drier, dustier side of a mountain. That's the ticket.

These spring and early summer bloomers are perfect for bringing bright spring color to rock gardens and borders along fences. Use them for early color in cottage gardens when planted in large groupings.

Wallflowers prefer soil pH neutral to slightly alkaline, about 6.5 to 8.0, although they'll be fine in most soils as long as the extremes of pH are avoided.

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How to Plant Wallflowers

Wallflowers are found in single nursery pots or bunches of bare roots, depending on your selected species and cultivar. You can also buy seeds for fall or early spring sowing.

For established plants:

- Remove all weeds, stones, roots, and rocks.
- Make a cereal bowl-shaped hole as deep as the root ball and twice as wide. Loosen the sides and bottom of the hole. Compacted soil makes it difficult for roots to penetrate and for

girdling roots.

- Test fit, check for depth, and ensure no roots are bent over or circling the hole. The top of the root ball should be at ground level.
- Backfill the hole with native soil, ensuring no air pockets around the roots.
- Keep filling the soil around the roots, firming it with your hands, and watering when complete.

To start wallflowers from seed outdoors

- Prepare the bed, working it loose, adding a bit of compost, and raking it smooth.
- Sow by scattering or broadcasting seeds on top of moist soil. Don't cover them with soil, as they need light to germinate.
- If birds won't leave your seeds alone, spread a very light layer of dry straw over the top. You should still be able to see soil peaking through. Break the straw into finer pieces easily by rubbing a handful vigorously between your palms as if you were trying to warm your hands

GROWING

Newly planted wallflowers will need watering weekly for the first summer unless you receive sufficient rain. Wallflowers don't need to be fertilized and do quite well in lower-fertility soils.

Pinching off dead blooms will encourage more flowering. Once established, wallflowers are drought tolerant and prefer a few deep waterings to many shallow ones.

Shrubbier forms of wallflowers benefit from pruning annually in midsummer to keep them in a bushy habit. Left to their own, they can get spindly and woody.



Pink and red Erysimum wallflower 'Constant Cheer' in flower. Credit: Alex Manders

- **‘Erysistible Sunset’** (*E. linifolium*) is a colorful selection from the first series of wallflowers to be hardy in USDA zone 5. Its multicolored blooms resemble a sunset’s pinks, oranges, and purples. A compact plant that reaches 18-24 inches high, perfect for adding to larger containers or as a mid-height specimen in a border bed.
- **‘Bowles Me Away’** (*E. linifolium*) is hardy to USDA zone 6. It’s a densely foliated plant covered in lilac colored-blooms which are brilliant in spring.
- **‘Sunset Apricot’** (*E. cheiri*) is an RHS Award of Garden Merit winner. Gorgeous and highly fragrant creamy yellow and apricot blooms in spring are worthy of planting en masse.
- **Western wallflower** (*E. capitatum*) is a showy native with bright orange blooms. It’s a short-lived perennial, but readily self-sows.

GARDENING PRODUCTS



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WIT AND WISDOM

- Wallflowers are highly attractive to pollinators and can serve as an early summer food source when little else is in bloom.
- Wallflowers often take root in the cracks and crevices of stone walls, giving rise to their common name.

FLOWERS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

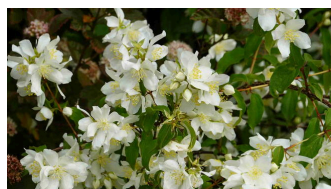
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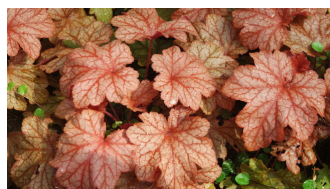
Andy Wilcox is a flower farmer and master gardener with a passion for soil health, small producers, forestry, and horticulture.

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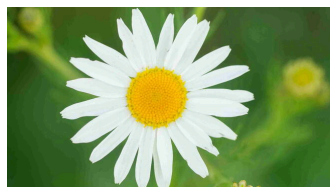
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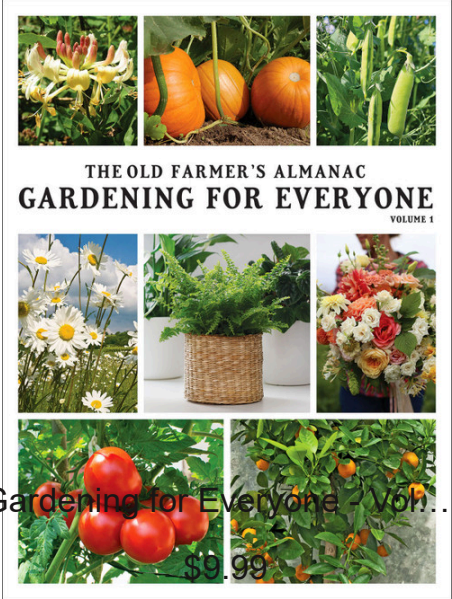
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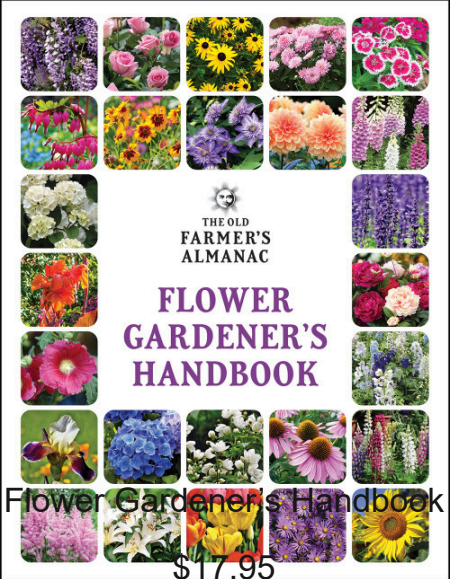
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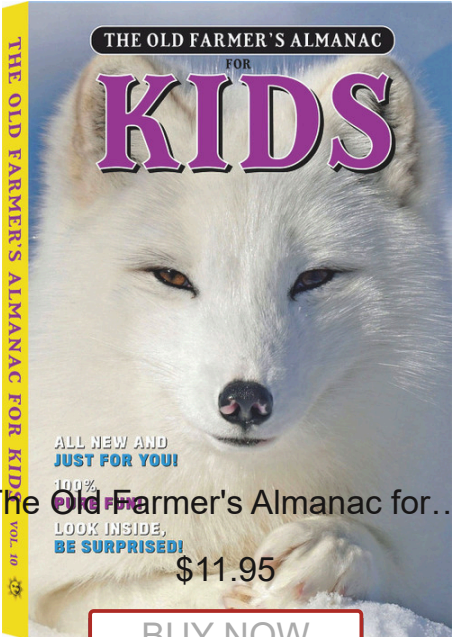
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