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Growing Pincushion Flowers (Scabiosa): A Complete Guide



Scabiosa 'Butterfly Blue' (Pincushion Flower)
in Garden

Photo Credit: Kabar

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Learn How to Plant, Grow, and Care for Pincushion Flowers

Last Updated: March 27, 2025

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Sometimes, plants are so aptly named that when you see one, you immediately understand how it got its name. This annual flower looks like a colorful pincushion from a sewing kit filled with pins! If you aren't familiar with the *Scabiosa* genus of flowers, you've missed some colorful blooms and fascinating history. Learn how to grow pincushion flowers.

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About Pincushion Flower

in the *Scabiosa* genus, classified under many different botanical names, including *Scabiosa columbaria*, *S. atropurpurea*, *S. caucasica*, *S. stellata*, and others.

According to the North Carolina Extension, some varieties, like *S. atropurpurea*, grow best as annuals, although they can occasionally overwinter in the right situation. The annuals lean towards being smaller than their perennial counterparts and tend to self-seed quite impressively.

On average, pincushion flower plants reach 2 to 4 feet tall. The blooms themselves vary in size, too, from petite 1-inch flowers on some varieties up to larger 3½-inch flowers on others. They add beautiful layers of color to the garden and are a great landscaping choice for grouping or massing. They make great edging plants, too!

Did we mention the pollinators? Butterflies and hummingbirds are big fans of pincushion blooms. And while *Scabiosa*

garden, they make an absolutely stunning addition to cut flower bouquets and ar-
rangements. They dry beautifully, so you can extend your enjoyment of their blooms into the winter months.

If you like pollinator-friendly blooms and easy-to-grow flowers in beautiful colors, you'll fall in love with pincushion flowers.

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- [How to Grow Nigella \(Love-in-a-Mist\): The Complete Nigella Flower Guide](#)
- [How to Grow Bellflowers: The Complete Guide to Campanula](#)

PLANTING

The pincushion flower is of Mediterranean origin and is content in a full-sun situation, although it can tolerate a bit of shade, especially if you live in a location where the afternoon sun gets particularly hot. Generally, pincushion flowers like temperate climates that aren't too hot and aren't too cold.

When to Plant

- You can direct sow seeds in the garden in the spring, as soon as the threat of frost has passed.
- Or, you can start seeds indoors 4 to 8 weeks before your last frost date. (See [your local frost dates on the Almanac's](#)

Many varieties of *Scabiosa* require over 90 days to maturity, so if you have a short growing season, it's wise to start them indoors to give your seeds a head start.

How to Plant

- Whether you're planting seeds indoors or out, lightly cover the seeds with 1/8 or ¼ inch of soil. Don't cover the seeds too much!
- Wait until after your last frost to transplant outdoors. You'll want to harden off the plants first.
- When transplanting seedlings, space them 9 to 12 inches apart. If direct sowing, space seeds at the same distance or thin to that distance after germination.
- You can also propagate perennial varieties of pincushion flowers by division. They are easy to grow from seed, though!

GROWING

While easy to grow, pincushion flower will

when it comes to staking

and deadheading.

- Pincushion flower needs well-draining soil. This is very important if you want to avoid root rot (which is always a good idea!).
- The plants are somewhat drought tolerant.
- Rich soil is hugely beneficial for pincushion flowers, so bring on the compost!
- Deadheading is recommended by the PennState Extension.
- As the season progresses, the stalks may need staking. They just require a bit of help in order to stand up straight, so give them a helping hand!
- Full sun is ideal unless you're in a very warm location with hot afternoon sun. In that case, a small amount of afternoon shade is acceptable.
- Pincushion flower is happy in neutral to alkaline soil with a pH of at least 6.0.
- Some of the smaller varieties of pincushion flower can be successfully

Types

- ‘Butterfly Blue’ is a popular and well-known variety, named Perennial Plant of the Year in 2000 by the Perennial Plant Association (*S. Columbaria*). See the featured image at the top of this page.
- ‘Pink Mist’ has (you guessed it) pink flowers (*S. Columbaria*).
- ‘Black Knight’ has dark burgundy flowers and is carried by many seed catalogs (*S. Atropurpurea*).
- ‘Beaujolais Bonnets’ is also burgundy (*S. Atropurpurea*).



Scabiosa atropurpurea (Pincushion Flower). Credit: Fran_pt

HARVESTING

As previously noted, these beauties make

- The sky is the limit for different combinations of bouquets containing pincushion flower. You can choose varieties of different colors or shades of the same color or pair them with other popular cut flowers.
- Pincushion flowers dry well! Just hang stems and blooms upside down in a dark area for a couple of weeks.



Pincushion flower brings delicate beauty to any room. Credit: Carol La Rosa

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PESTS/DISEASES

Pincushion flowers are generally healthy plants except for their susceptibility to root rot. The [University of Florida Extension](#) says they have no significant problems. Just keep an eye out for:

- Aphids
- Mites
- Whiteflies
- Powdery mildew
- Root rot

See our [Plant Pest and Disease Library](#) for tips on these problems.

But you can also rest easy: Deer don't like pincushion flowers!

WIT AND WISDOM

- Pincushion flower was originally be-

- Scabiosa was historically used to treat skin conditions, including scabies, and the name derives from a Latin word for itching or scratching.
- The pincushion flower is sometimes known as the “mourning bride” because of its dark blossoms and its association with widowhood in England in the 1700s.
- It is also sometimes known as sweet scabiosa.
- Thomas Jefferson is believed to have grown pincushion flowers at Monticello in the early 1800s.
- *Scabiosa comosa* is the national flower of Mongolia.

FLOWERS

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Samantha Johnson is an award-winning author and gardening expert with over 20 years of experi-

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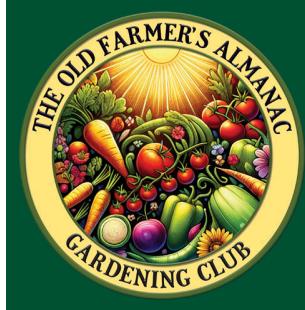
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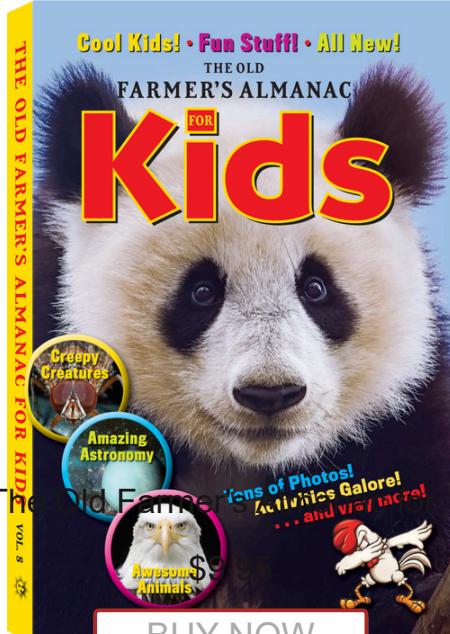
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