

2018 is the Year of the Coreopsis

In the language of flowers, *Coreopsis* means “always cheerful,” and these delightful natives of the Americas live up to this designation in glorious fashion. Equally at home in naturalized prairie settings or manicured landscapes, *Coreopsis* provide a lovely sunny presence wherever they make their home. Although typically seen in colors of yellow and gold, many species also contain red, bronze and burgundy colors and have been commonly used as dyes in native fabrics. The flowers were also boiled into teas by the natives of North America before the introduction of coffee. In recognition of the importance of the genus, Florida and Mississippi have named *Coreopsis* as their state’s wildflower.

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History of Coreopsis

As many as 80 *Coreopsis* species can be found naturalized in the Americas with 38 listed in the lower forty-eight states. A member of the Asteraceae family, which covers a broad collection of daisy-like flowers commonly called composites, *Coreopsis* flowers are made up of two primary elements; the showy ray of colorful petals that surround a typically bronze or brown center of disk flowers. Unlike its cousins in the Sunflower group (*Helianthus*, *Heliopsis*, and *Helenium*), botanists opted to name our cheerful floral friend with reference to the appearance of its seed rather than the beauty of its flowers. Hence the common name ‘Tickseed’ which derives from the Greek ‘korus’ meaning bed-bug and ‘opsis’ meaning appearance and referring to the resemblance of the seed. Regardless of the less-than endearing botanical designation, *Coreopsis* carries on with its “always cheerful” show of abundant, colorful flowers in the spring and summer garden!

Key Species and Cultivars

Coreopsis can be hardy to USDA zone 3 (*C. verticillata*, *C. tripteris*) and range into the extreme heat of Florida and the Southwestern states (*C. floridana*, *C. tinctoria*). Many of the species are self-seeding and considered annuals (*C. tinctoria*) however the most common perennial *Coreopsis* include Whorled tickseed (*C. verticillata*), Lobed tickseed (*C. auriculata*) and Large Flowered tickseed (*C. grandiflora*). The variety ‘Early Sunrise’ (*C. grandiflora*) was designated an AAS Winner in 1989 and remains among the best-selling *Coreopsis* for garden use. Other important varieties include ‘Moonbeam,’ ‘Zagreb’ (*C. verticillata*) and ‘Nana’ (*C. auriculata*). *Coreopsis* species have been heavily hybridized for decades to improve plant flowering, flower size, and disease tolerance. ‘Sunkiss’ (*C. grandiflora*), the Big Bang™, HARDY JEWEL™ and UpTick™ series (*C. x hybrida*) are among the most significant new introductions and represent dedication and years of effort by plant breeders. There are dozens of commercially available cultivars varying in height from 6” to 3’ and covering a broad color range from the traditional yellow to caramel, bronze, red, gold, rose and cream-white. They can be incorporated into nearly any area of the garden where the height and color are needed.



Care and Cultivation

Gardeners have had success cultivating *Coreopsis* for centuries. This is due in large part to the care-free growing nature of the genus. The J.T. Lovett Company of Little Silver NJ listed *C. lanceolata* as “one of the finest hardy plants grown” in their catalog of 1891 adding “a bed of it in full bloom is a sight indeed!” Today, *Coreopsis* is in the top ten genera of cultivated perennial plants. *Coreopsis* commercially available in today’s retail outlets prefer sunny locations with well-drained soils as these are typically derived from the northern and prairie

species. Varieties in *C. verticillata* are known to expand their territory by underground rhizomes and should be renewed periodically unless the gardener wants them to take over the space allotted altogether. *Coreopsis* are considered to be long-day obligate plants which mean they need a day length greater than 12 hours (typically 13 – 14 hours) to produce flowers. One notable exception is *C. auriculata* ‘Nana’ which flowers under shorter day length. Most cultivars will re-bloom when old flowers



are removed. This can be accomplished by removing individual spent flowers or by shearing the plant to 50% of its original flowering height. Re-blooming will occur within a few weeks. Due to their abundance of flowers, *Coreopsis* is a pollinator magnet attracting bees and butterflies to their blossoms and birds to their seeds. They are also resistant to deer feeding and considered drought tolerant. *Coreopsis* in the garden does benefit from fertilizing in the spring to encourage new growth. Although we believe *Coreopsis* to be a garden plant, they are equally at home in containers and will provide all the show and interest as a container plant. Consider varieties in the *C. grandiflora* and *C. x hybrida* group for container use.

Given the beauty, resilience, and popularity of *Coreopsis*, it is entirely fitting that the National Garden Bureau has designated 2018 as the Year of the *Coreopsis*.

The National Garden Bureau recognizes and thanks Karl Batschke from Darwin Perennials as author and contributor to this fact sheet. This fact sheet is provided as an educational service of the National Garden Bureau. There are no limitations on the use but please credit National Garden Bureau when using all or parts of this article or referencing the Year of program.

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