

Tom's Garden

Blog August 2021

Catnip and Catmint

Catnip (*Nepeta cataria*)

This is the one cats like. Catnip is a herbaceous perennial plant commonly cultivated as a garden herb. It is used to flavor herbal teas, juices and soups. Catnip is widely known for its peculiar behavioral effect on cats, so people use it as a toy stuffer or treat for their feline friends. Cats are attracted to the odor of catnip, which binds to receptors in their noses and produces behavior that appears euphoric. The effects of catnip can last from about ten minutes to an hour, depending on the cat. I had a cat some years ago that it had no effect on whatsoever!

Does catnip make cats aggressive?

It can act as a stimulant or a sedative, and can produce aggressive behavior.

Are dogs attracted to catnip?

Some dogs, especially where cats and dogs live together, can be interested in catnip.

They sniff and play with the stems and leaves of the plants just like cats do, but they don't have the ecstatic response.

Catnip is safe and edible for dogs too.

Catnip is also an invasive weed.



In the U.S. catnip often escapes into the wild, which affects the local environment and ecosystem. It can grow and thrive easily in various habitats. It often lives in pastures, river banks, landfills, parking lots and along the road.

Native to Europe and Asia, catnip has been naturalized in many parts of the world, including southern Canada and the United States.

How to control it

The best time to remove weeds is before they bear seeds.

1. Pulling out: weeds can be removed in early spring or early fall. Its root system needs to be removed to prevent it from growing again.
2. Chemical control: herbicide can effectively remove weeds if they are in large amounts.
3. Mowing: Mowing twice a year. Weeds can be effectively controlled by mowing for 2 consecutive years.

Catmint spp

Catmint is one of those plants that thrives on neglect. Many new varieties are sterile and produce no viable seeds. This is important if you don't like the weedy, self-seeding habit of older catmint varieties, but it also means you will have to buy plants or take cuttings or divisions. It is best to do that in the spring.

Choose a sunny spot with well-draining soil. A lean soil and dry growing conditions will encourage more flowers and a stronger scent. Too much fertilizer will make the plant grow lots of flimsy, leafy foliage. Depending on the variety, they will mature around 12 to 24 inches tall and 12 to 24 inches wide. Some new varieties are more compact and others will grow 4 feet tall and 3 feet wide. The best thing to do is shop around and read the plant description labels before you buy.

Expect your *Nepeta* to start blooming in early summer with repeat blooms throughout the growing season. This makes catmint a wonderful landscape specimen. Dead heading or shearing your plants will give you stockier plants and a lush second bloom.

*'six hills giant' *Nepeta x faassenii* : 36 inches tall and wide. Give it plenty of room.

**Nepeta subsessilis* 'sweet dreams' : Pink flowers with burgundy bracts. 2 feet tall and 3 feet wide.

**Nepeta racemose* 'walkers low' : lavender-blue flowers with 8 inch spikes. 2007 perennial plant of the year. 2 feet tall and wide. One of the hardiest and most reliable.

**Nepeta racemose* 'little titch' : dwarf variety with pale blue flowers. Long blooming, but its growth stops at about 8 to 10 inches tall and 15 inches wide.

Anise Hyssop

Attract bees, butterflies and hummingbirds with this deer-resistant bloomer.

Contrary to its common name, Anise Hyssop (*Agastache foeniculum*) is not anise or hyssop, it is a member of the mint family. The leaves give off a subtle anise scent. The scent is more like basil or French tarragon. This perennial is native to the Midwest and Great Plains states. It blooms abundantly from mid to late summer through early fall, attracting bees, butterflies and hummingbirds. Their long blooming period makes them good for cut flowers and mass plantings.

Common names: Licorice mint, hummingbird mint, blue giant hyssop, agastache, anise hyssop blue hyssop. Mature size is 2-4 feet tall and 1-3 feet wide.

Anise Hyssop likes full sun and well-drained loam or sandy soil, neutral PH. Heavy clay causes winter problems.

Hardiness zone USDA 3-8.



It has a long history of use by Native Americans. Anise hyssop is a versatile, aromatic, culinary, healing herb. It has many uses in the garden and kitchen. Birds will eat any seeds left on the stalks by the end of fall. Gold finches, especially love to glean the seeds off the plant, creating a wonderful photo opportunity.

Both the flowers and leaves offer a licorice scent and taste. Crumble aromatic leaves in salads, use them to make jellies, or steep them in herbal tea. Put them in potpourris. Sprinkle seeds in cookie, muffin or biscotti recipes.

Fresh flowers make interesting additions to bouquets. Hang the spikes upside down to dry for dried floral arrangements.

Divide the plant every 3 to 5 years. This will help to rejuvenate the entire plant and you can replant the divisions in other places in your landscape. Space the plants 2 feet apart.

The only real problem with this plant is poorly drained soil. Anise Hyssop is a hardy, vigorous, deer-resistant perennial.



Goldfinch on Anise hyssop

Gladiolus is the birth month flower for August. They are in abundance from mid-July through August.



Gladiolus brings strength of character, moral integrity, remembrance, infatuation and honor to mind. It was once thought of as the funeral flower. This long-lasting flower comes in a variety of colors like pink, red, yellow, orange, white and green. Try these in your garden next year for wonderful color during the summer. Bulbs are planted in early spring and lifted for the winter for best results.

