



# Top 50 English Cottage Garden Flowers Plants for Pollinators

Herbaceous, European hardy plants you can grow in the UK to create a traditional English Cottage garden that keeps on giving from late spring through to early autumn with flowers to help our pollinating insects

**List Curated by Thomas McBride**

From research data collected and collated at the  
National Botanic Garden of Wales

NB: Butterflies and Moths are not studied at the NBGW so any data on nectar plants beneficial for them is taken from Butterfly Conservation





# Introduction



Traditional Old English-style cottage gardens have a rich and interesting history. Originating in England but replicated elsewhere in the UK and abroad, these gardens came about in Medieval times and have been grown ever since by thousands up and down the nation. Originally, the garden would have been a central part of many villages, containing medicinal plants and herbs as well as a beehive with plenty of flowers as forage for the honeybees, edible plants and sometimes also relics of previous generations' expeditions.



Many of our garden cultivars started life as a hybrid, cross-bred and grown on, in these cottage gardens and, today, many growers seek out these heritage varieties to stop them being lost. The top 50 selected plants are all herbaceous, except the rose, and will flower between May and September. They are all European natives, as these would have been the plants most available to medieval growers of the past. However, today plants from all across the globe often make it into our gardens, so this is by no means an exhaustive list. We have not included edibles, or many medicinal plants and herbs, as there are separate categories for them – this list is all about colour, scent and attracting pollinators in abundance!



# Creating an Old English-style Cottage Garden

Those of you who live in a quaint stone cottage, perhaps even with a thatched roof, are already halfway there with creating an old English aesthetic but, for those who are less fortunate (lets face it, that's most of us!), there are many ways to still capture that atmosphere of idyll and old-fashioned country ways with clever planting and placement of other garden features.



Traditional borders are all about layering the planting. In order to achieve a border that looks full and colourful from all angles, choose tall perennials for the centre of the border such as delphiniums, hollyhocks and verbascum. Medium-height plants are next, such as shorter rose bushes and paeonies. Finally, the shortest flowers should be placed on the periphery of the border such as calendulas, marjoram and lavender. If the border backs onto a wall, height can be created with trellis which can be used



for climbing plants such as honeysuckle, sweet pea and roses. For borders that do not back onto a wall, it is most ideal if the central plants are taller than head height. This will break up the garden making it more interesting and will draw the eye down the paths. Paths should be as narrow as possible between beds which will also create a more traditional feel. You could even place stone statues to add to the effect.





# Guide to using these pages:

## Map

Maps depict the native area of the plant (in green)  
They also show areas the plant is naturalised (in purple)

All maps shown are derived from 'Plants of the World Online'; courtesy of Kew Gardens

Flowering Period (this is when it is good for pollinators!)

Plant Family

Growing habit and mature size of the plant

Latin Binomial Name

*Delphinium elatum*

Common English Name

Candle Larkspur

Photograph of the plant in flower

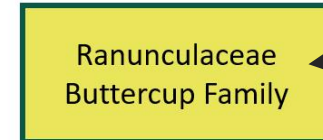


Insect groups known to favour the nectar of this plant

Useful knowledge or warnings about the plant



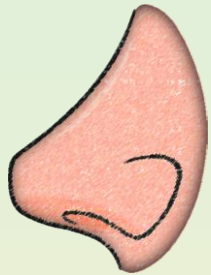
RHS AGM cultivars of this species (or a related species occasionally)





# Key to these Pages

Additional information on these garden plants



The flowers and/or leaves have a Pleasant scent

This plant would only be suitable for meadow-style planting



Plant is often used in traditional Herbal Remedies



The plant has edible parts that are commonly eaten or used in cooking



## Warnings



Plant tissue is highly toxic if ingested



Sap may cause irritation (Wash hands after touching or avoid touching)



# Temperature

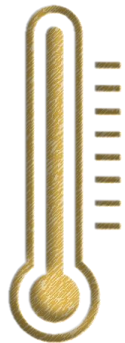
Some of the plants listed in our Top 200 are not fully hardy in all or some parts of the United Kingdom.

Plants without a thermometer symbol are fully hardy in the severest UK Winter; equating to **H5** or hardier.

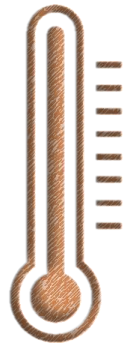
Plants with a coloured thermometer symbol are hardy to varying degrees as follows:



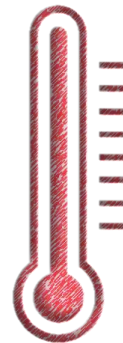
Almost Hardy  
**(H4)**



Half-Hardy  
**(H3)**



Not Frost Hardy  
**(H2)**



Not Hardy  
**(H1)**

## RHS Hardiness Scale

<b>H1a</b>	-	<b>Above 15°C</b>
<b>H1b</b>	-	<b>Minimum 10°C</b>
<b>H1c</b>	-	<b>Minimum 5°C</b>
<b>H2</b>	-	<b>Minimum 1°C</b>
<b>H3</b>	-	<b>Minimum -5°C</b>
<b>H4</b>	-	<b>Minimum -10°C</b>
<b>H5</b>	-	<b>Minimum -15°C</b>



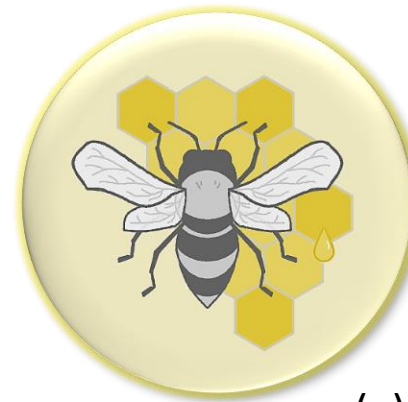
# Pollinators

Our data on pollinators has been collected from studies spanning over a decade. Pollinator symbols appear when plants are proven to be good nectar plants for certain insects.

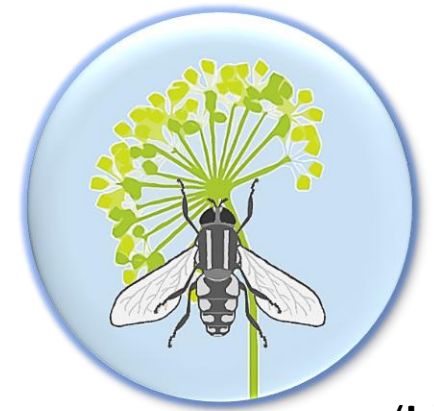
It should be noted that all bee and hoverfly data is ours but lepidoptera data is taken from Butterfly Conservation.

Our data spans a wide range of different insect species. For simplicity, these species have been condensed into six easy icons to represent them:

- |               |                                    |                  |
|---------------|------------------------------------|------------------|
| a) Honeybees  | c) Bumblebees                      | e) Moths         |
| b) Hoverflies | d) Butterflies<br>(Includes Moths) | f) Solitary Bees |



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)



(e)



(f)



# *Acanthus mollis*

## Bear's Breeches



'Rue Ledan'



Late Spring  
- Midsummer

Acanthaceae  
Acanthus Family

4ft Perennial



# *Aconitum napellus*

## Monk's-hood



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Teresa Grau Ros



'Spark's Variety'

Summer ☀

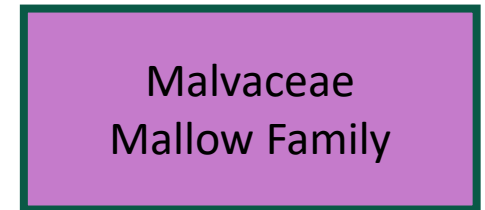
Ranunculaceae  
Buttercup Family

4ft Perennial



# *Alcea rosea*

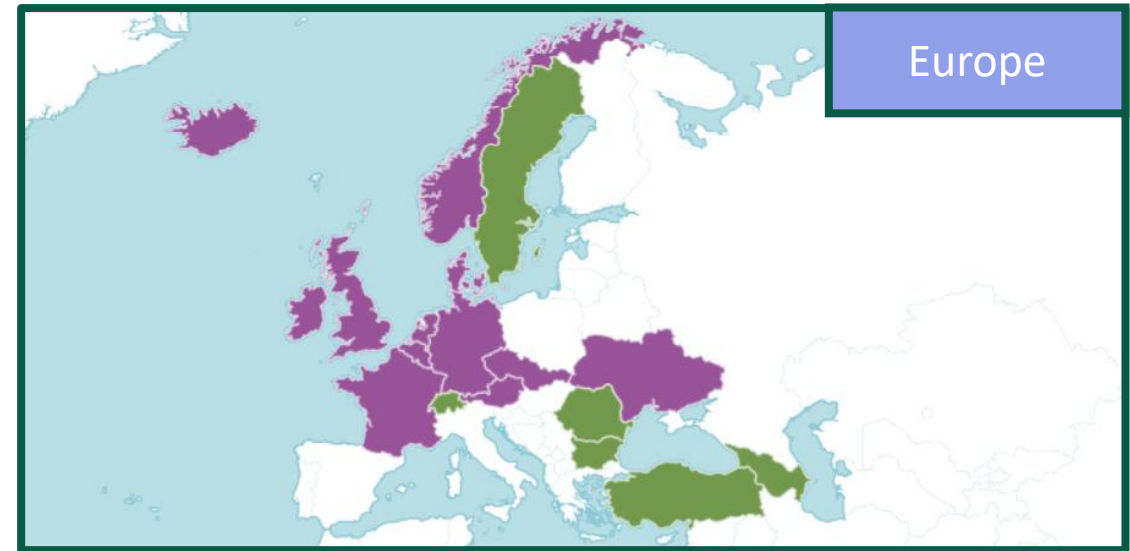
## Common Hollyhock





# *Alchemilla mollis*

## Garden Lady's Mantle



-Species-



Early Summer  
- Early Autumn

Rosaceae  
Rose Family

2ft Perennial



# *Allium hollandicum*

## Dutch Garlic, Persian Garlic



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Kerry Garratt

'Purple Sensation'



Summer ☀

Amaryllidaceae  
Daffodil Family

3ft Bulbous

# *Antirrhinum majus*

## Common Snapdragon



'Montego Pink'  
'Liberty Classic'



Early Summer  
- Early Autumn

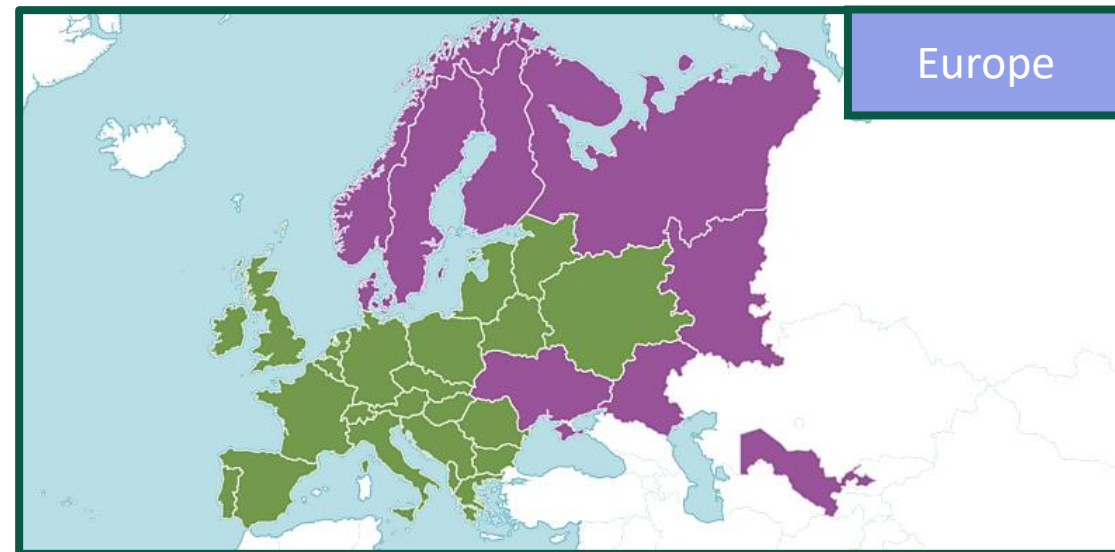
Plantaginaceae  
Plantain Family

2ft Perennial

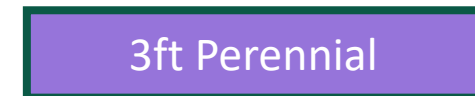
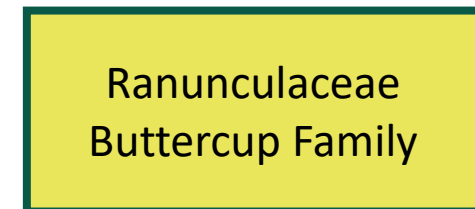


# *Aquilegia vulgaris*

## Grannie's Bonnet



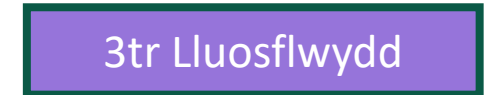
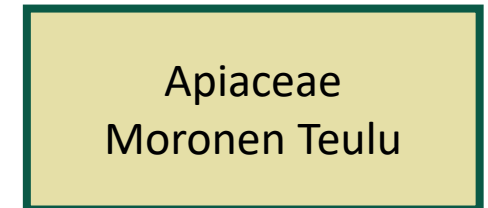
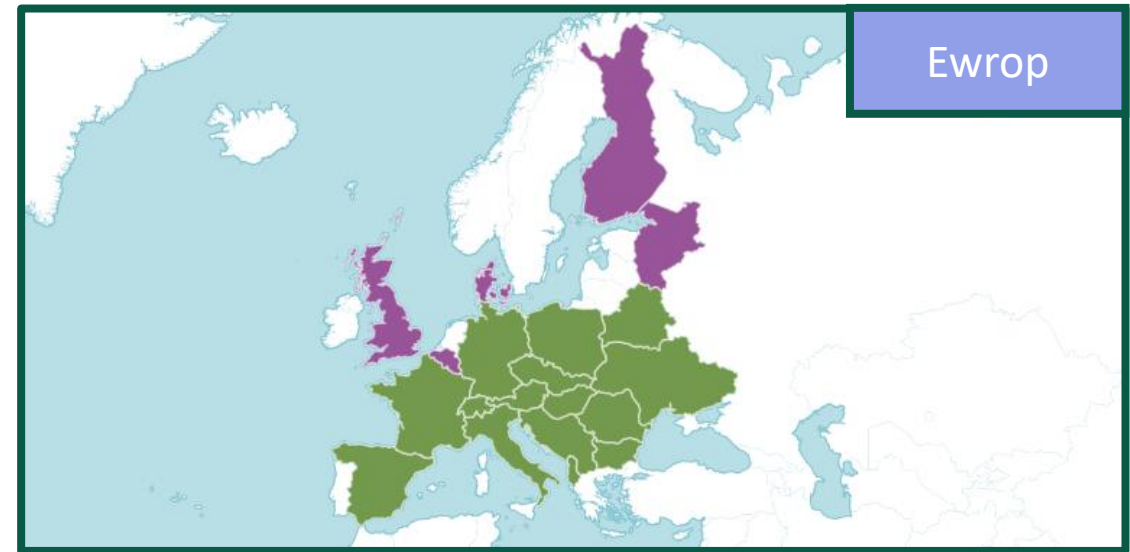
Photograph from Flickr (CC) Matt Fletcher





# *Astrantia major*

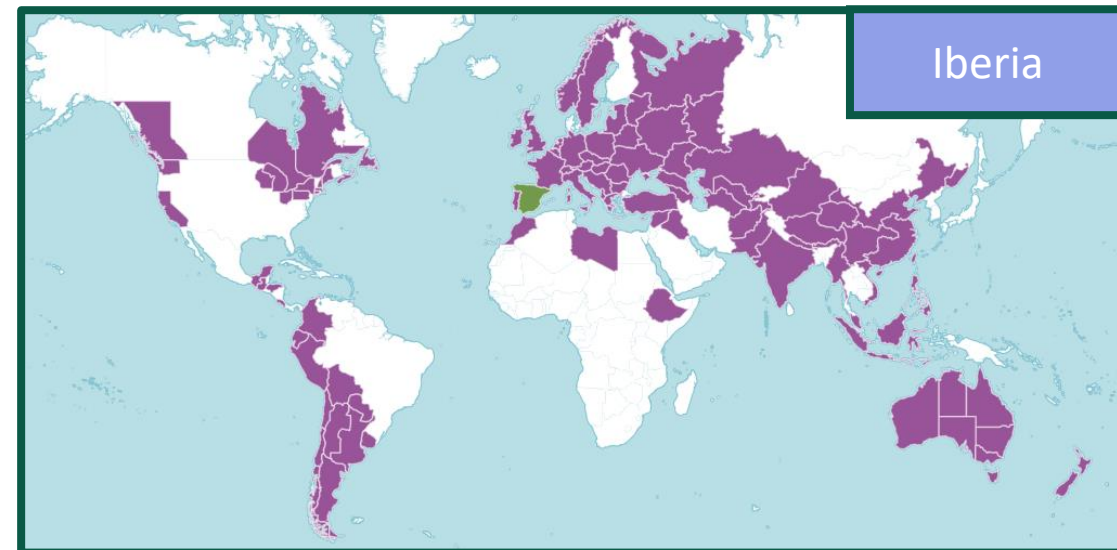
## Astrantia Fwyaf





# *Calendula officinalis*

## Common Marigold



'Fiesta Gitana'



Early Summer  
- Early Autumn

Asteraceae  
Daisy Family

2ft Annual



# *Campanula lactiflora*

## Milky Bellflower



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Linda de Volder



Caucasus

'Loddon Anna'  
'Prichard's Variety'



Summer ☀

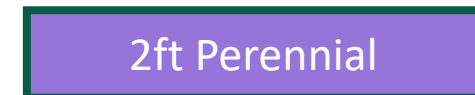
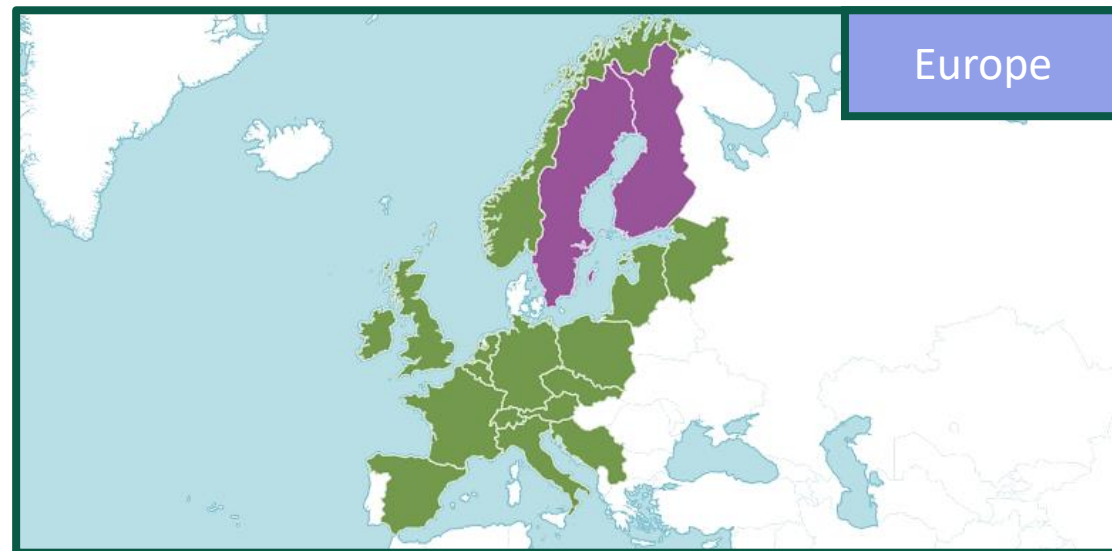
Campanulaceae  
Bellflower Family

3ft Perennial



# *Centaurea montana*

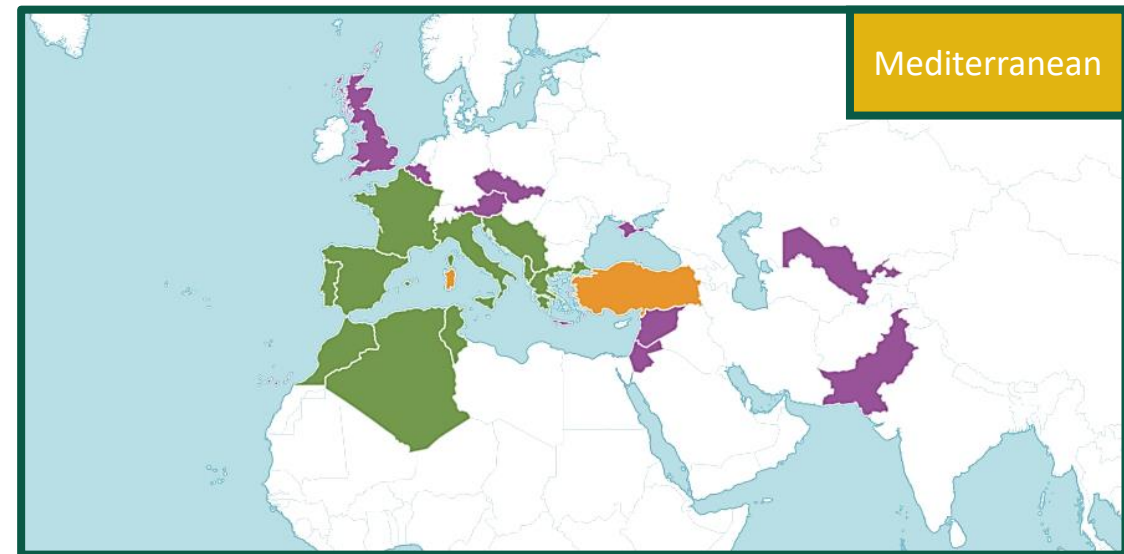
## Perennial Cornflower





# *Centranthus ruber*

## Red Valerian



None



Late Spring  
- Early Autumn

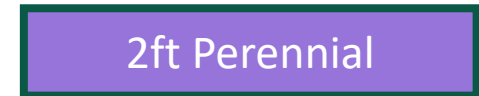
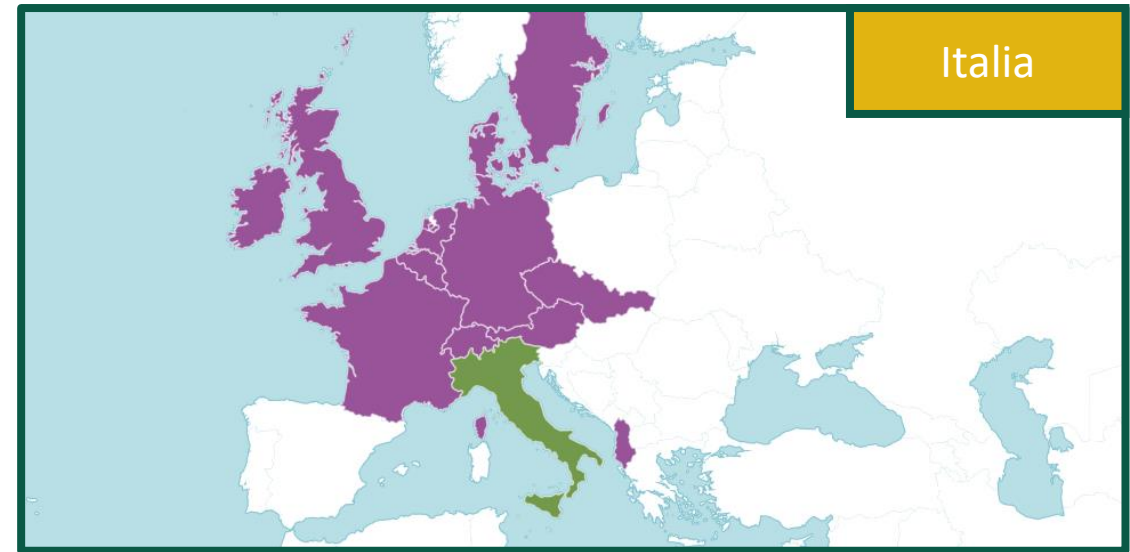
Caprifoliaceae  
Honeysuckle Family

3ft Perennial



# *Cerastium tomentosum*

Snow-in-Summer



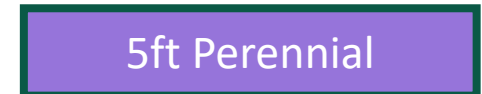
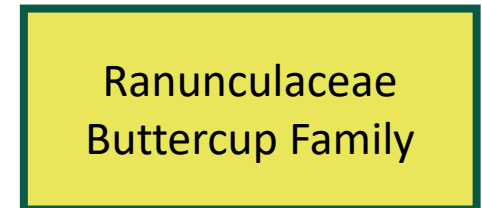


# *Delphinium elatum*

## Candle Larkspur



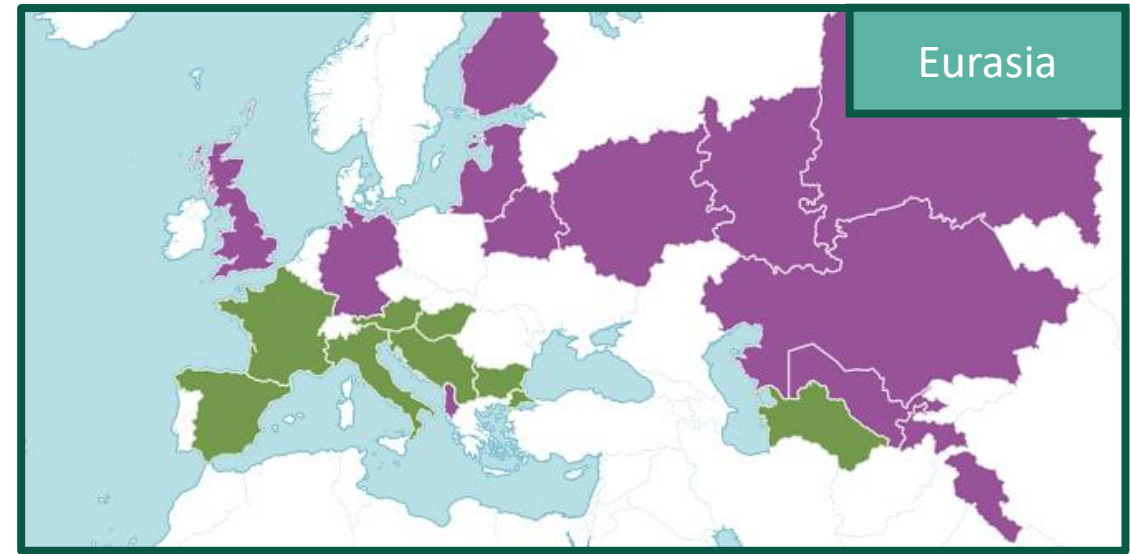
Photograph from Flickr (CC) Megan Wong





# *Dianthus barbatus*

## Sweet William



'Nigrescens series'  
'Super Parfait series'

RHS AWARD OF GARDEN MERIT

Late Spring  
- Midsummer

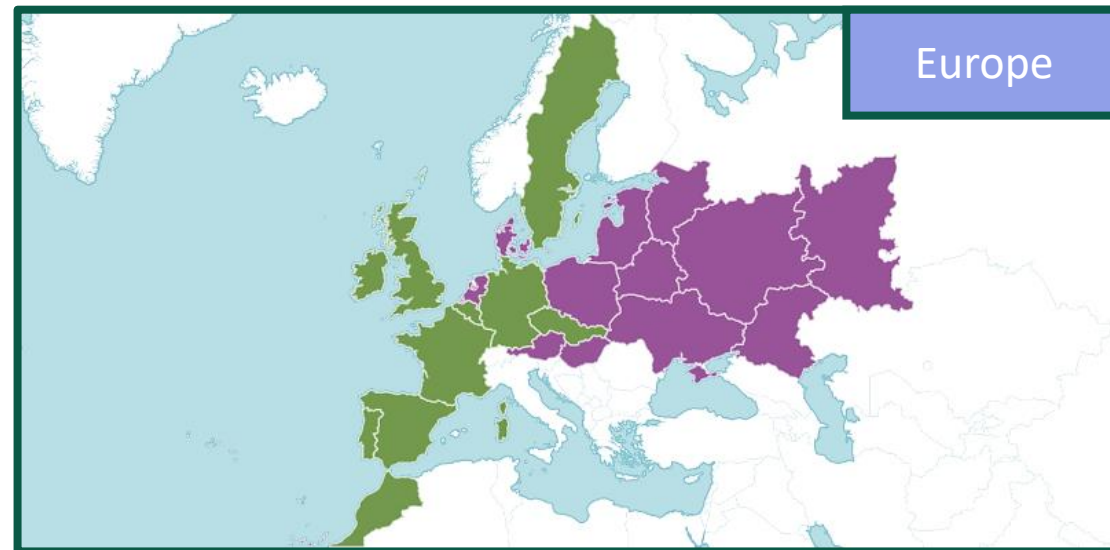
Caryophyllaceae  
Pink Family

2ft Biennial



# *Digitalis purpurea*

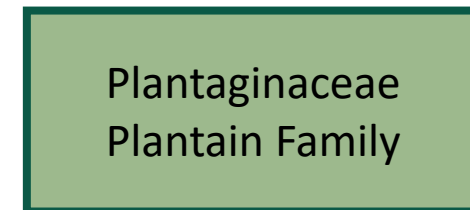
## Common Foxglove



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Joachim Blattboldt



'The Shirley'  
'Dalmatian series'





# *Echinops bannaticus*

## Blue Globe Thistle



Related Species: *Echinops ritro*

*Ssp. ruthenicus*

-Species-

The logo for the RHS Award of Garden Merit, featuring a green trophy cup inside a circular border with the text "RHS AWARD OF GARDEN MERIT" and a registered trademark symbol. To the right of the logo is a stylized white tree.

Summer ☀️

Asteraceae  
Daisy Family

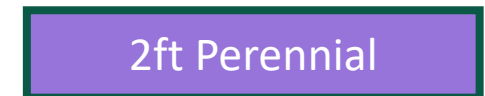
5ft Perennial

Photograph from Flickr (CC) Michael Levin-Clark



# *Eryngium bourgatii*

## Mediterranean Sea-holly





# *Erysimum linifolium*

## Mauve Wallflower



'Bowles Mauve'



Early Spring  
- Midsummer

Brassicaceae  
Mustard Family

3ft Perennial



# *Euphorbia characias*

## Mediterranean Spurge



'Tasmanian Tiger'  
'Blue Hills'



Mid Spring  
- Early Summer

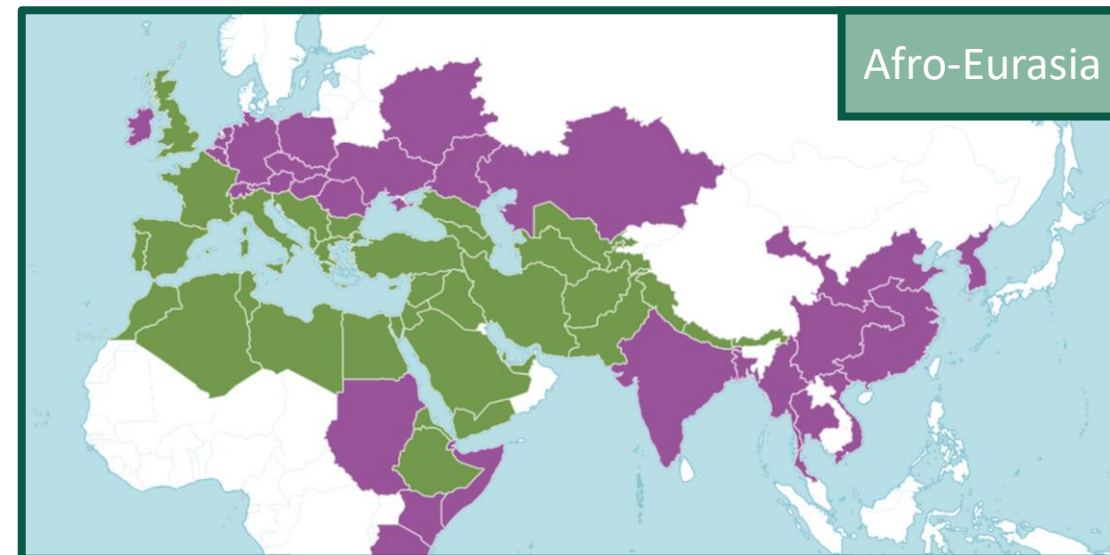
Euphorbiaceae  
Spurge Family

3ft Perennial

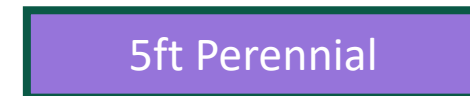


# *Foeniculum vulgare*

## Common Fennel



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Katy Wrathall





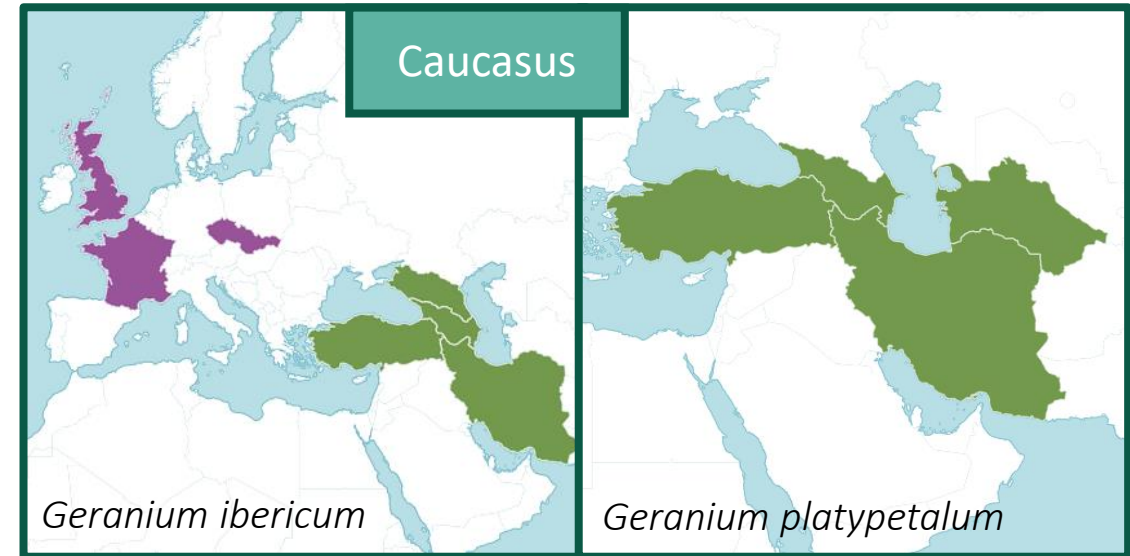
# *Geranium x magnificentum*

## Purple Cranesbill

*Geranium ibericum* x *Geranium platypetalum*



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Hornbeam Arts



*Geranium ibericum*

*Geranium platypetalum*

- Hybrid -



Summer ☀

Geraniaceae  
Cranesbill Family

2ft Perennial

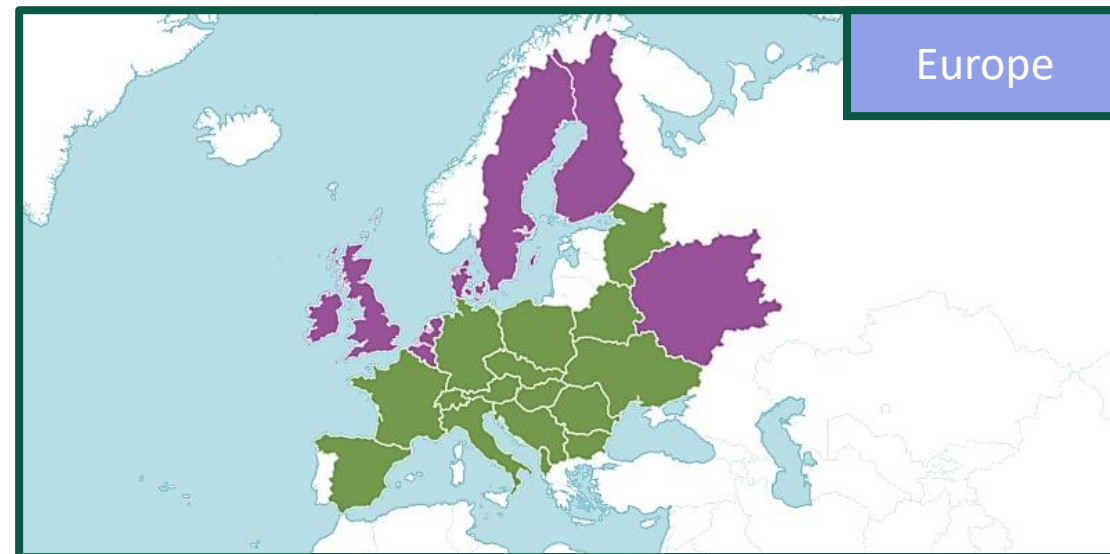


# *Geranium phaeum*

## Dusky Cranesbill



*Photograph from Flickr (CC) John Dal*



'Our Pat'

Late Spring  
- Midsummer

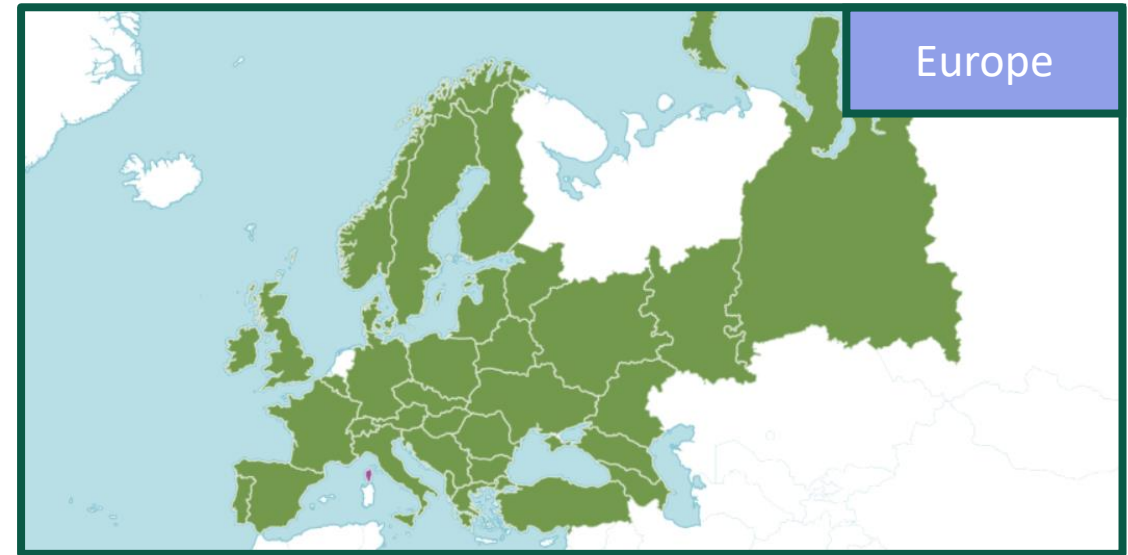
Geraniaceae  
Cranesbill Family

2ft Perennial



# *Geranium sanguineum*

## Bloody Cranesbill



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Hornbeam Arts

'Ankum's Pride'  
'Shepherd's Warning'

The logo for the RHS Award of Garden Merit, featuring a green trophy cup inside a circular border with the text "RHS AWARD OF GARDEN MERIT" and a registered trademark symbol. To the right is a stylized tree icon.

Summer ☀

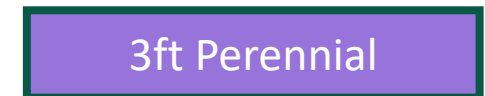
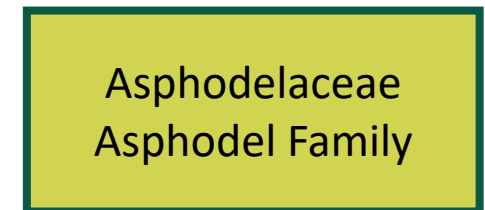
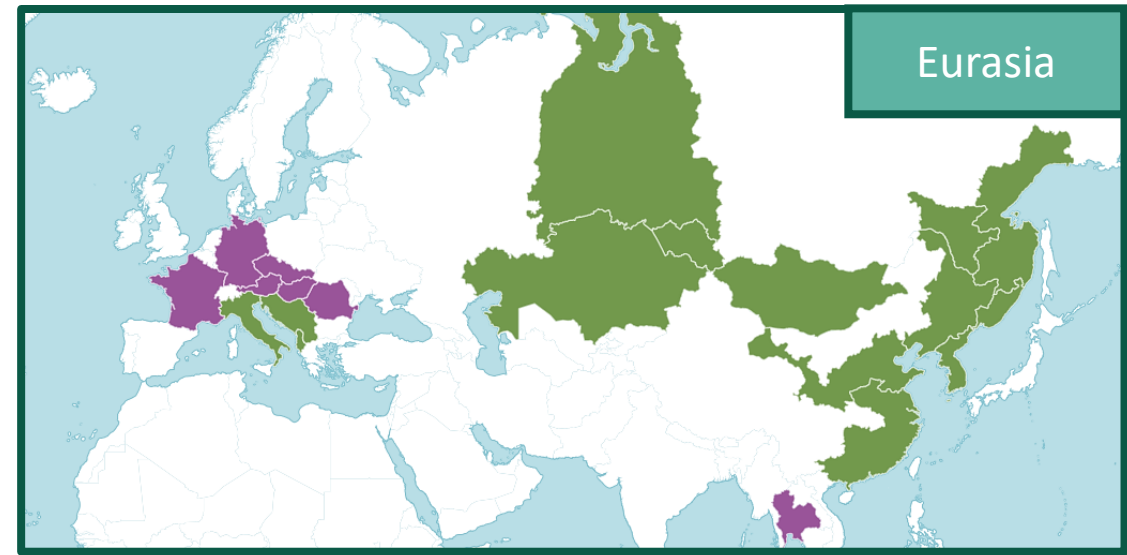
Geraniaceae  
Cranesbill Family

2ft Perennial



# *Hemerocallis lilioasphodelus*

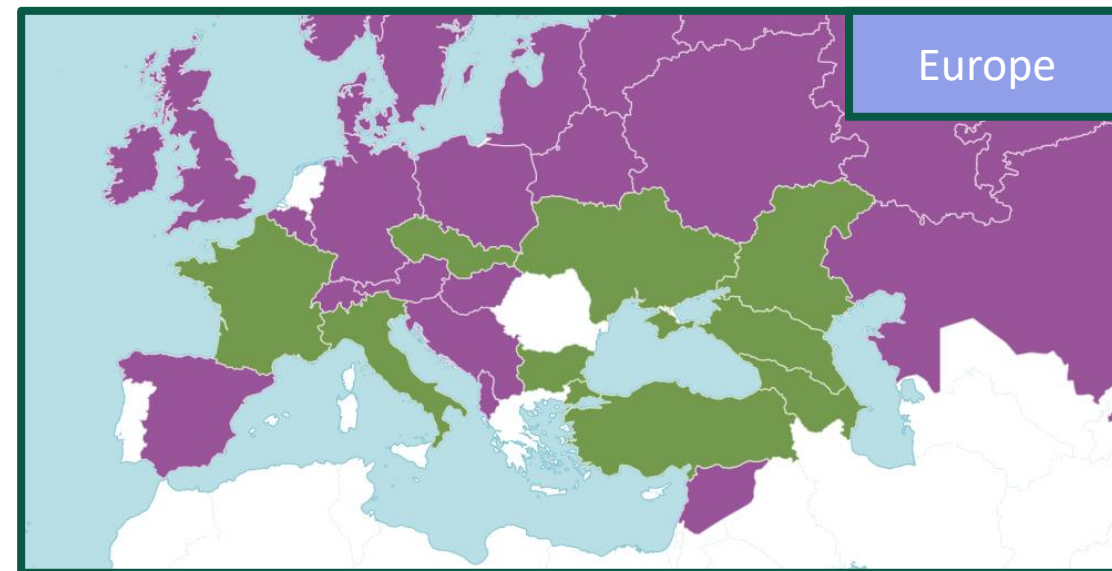
## Lemon Daylily





# *Hesperis matronalis*

Dame's-violet



None

Late Spring  
- Early Summer

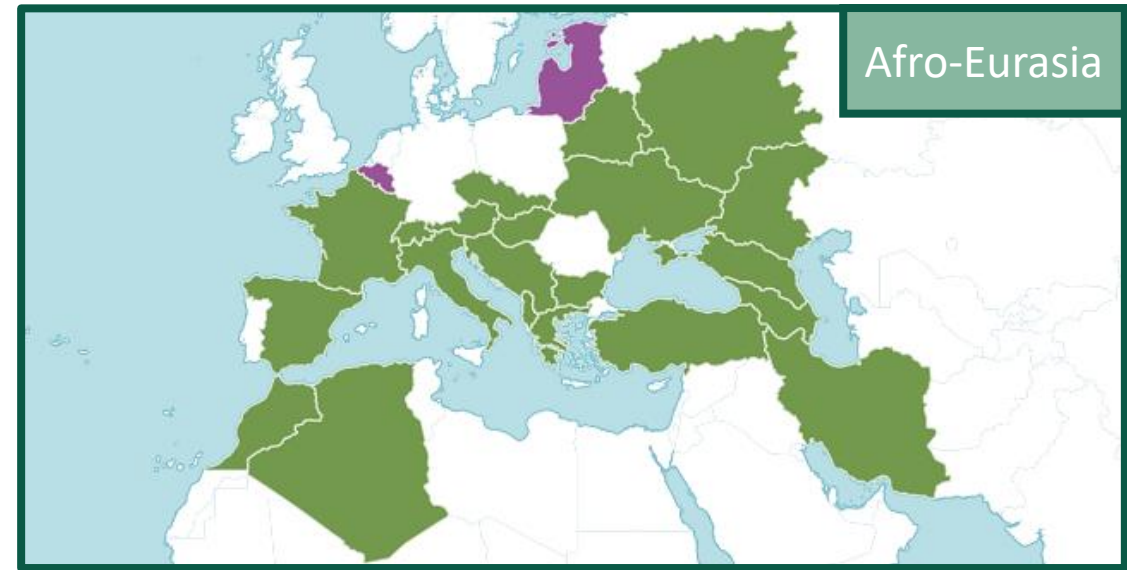
Brassicaceae  
Mustard Family

3ft Biennial



# *Hyssopus officinalis*

## Herb Hyssop



None

Midsummer  
- Early Autumn

Lamiaceae  
Mint Family

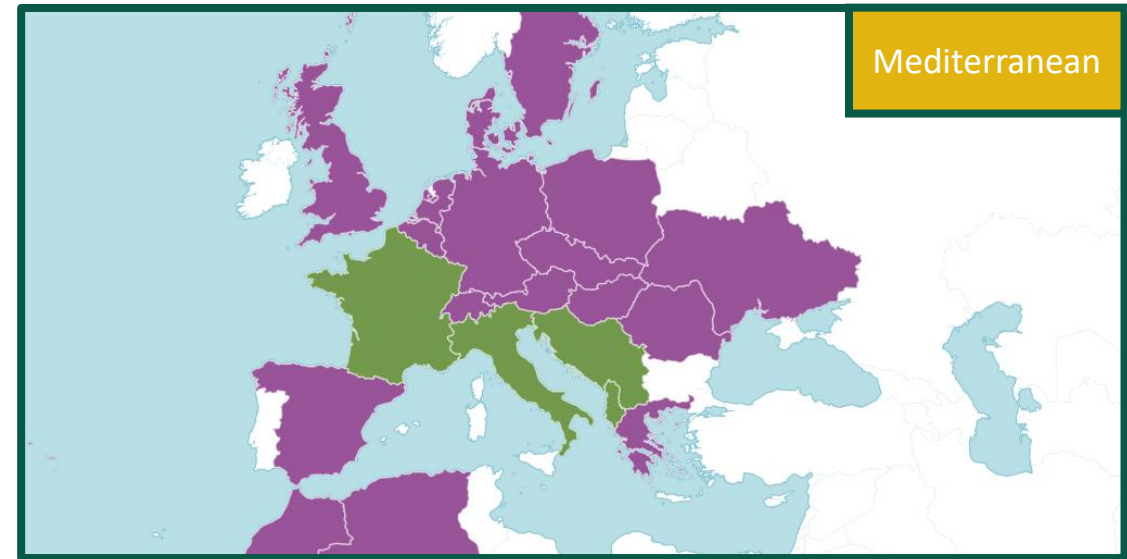
Small Subshrub





# *Iberis umbellata*

## Annual Candytuft





# *Knautia macedonica*

## Balkan Scabious



Photograph © Thomas McBride



Midsummer  
- Early Autumn

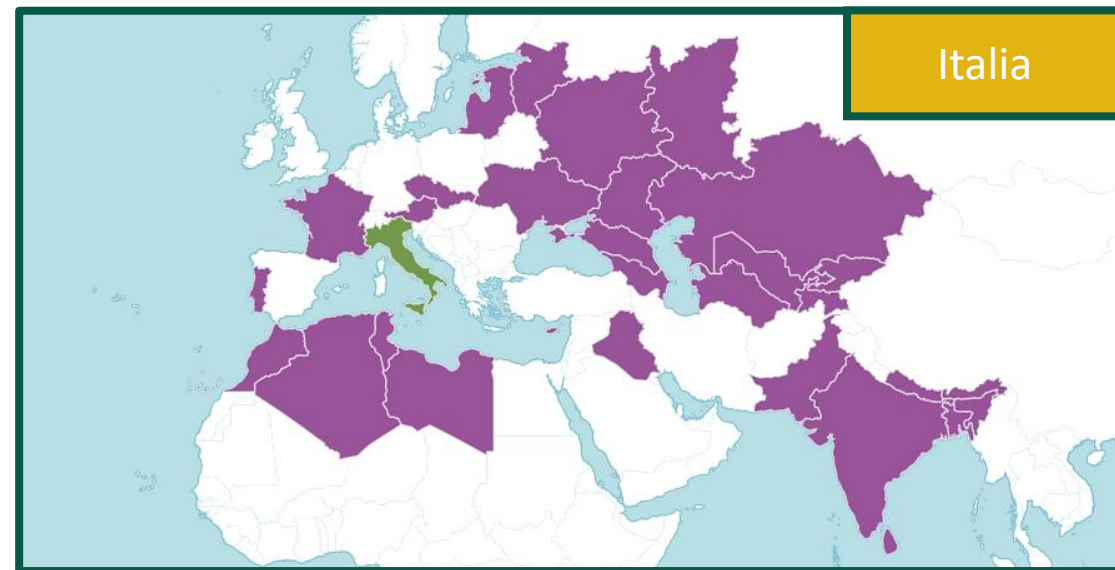
Caprifoliaceae  
Honeysuckle Family

4ft Perennial



# *Lathyrus odoratus*

## Sweet Pea



'Lipstick' 'Bristol'  
'Solway series'



Midsummer  
- Early Autumn

Fabaceae  
Legume Family

6ft Climber Annual

\* This plant, if sown early, should be sown inside during winter (cannot survive below -5°C night temperatures)

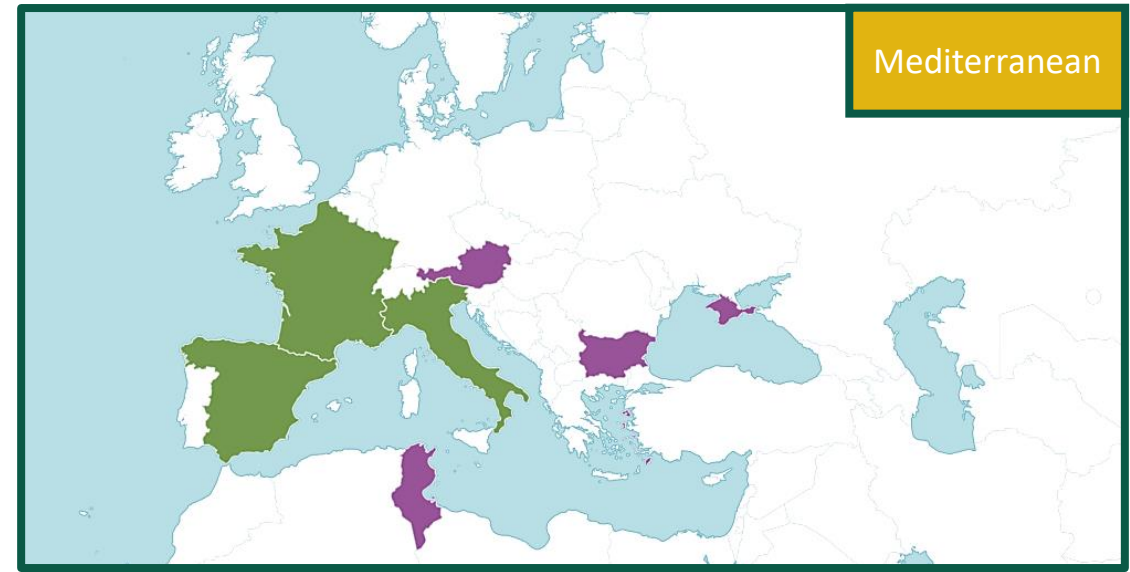


# *Lavandula angustifolia*

## English Lavender



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Peter Taylor



'Folgate' 'Hidcote'  
'Miss Katherine'



Summer ☀

Lamiaceae  
Mint Family

Small Shrub



# *Leucanthemum vulgare*

Oxeye Daisy, Marguerite



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Antoinette Janssen



None

Late Spring  
- Early Summer

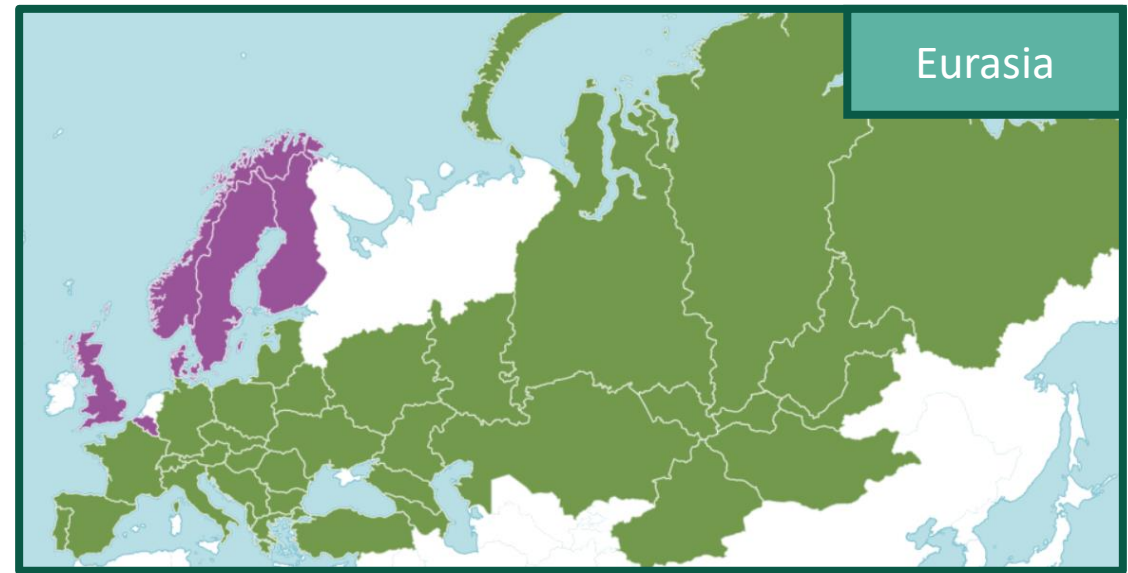
Asteraceae  
Daisy Family

3ft Perennial



# *Lilium martagon*

## Turk's Cap Lily



- Species -



Summer ☀

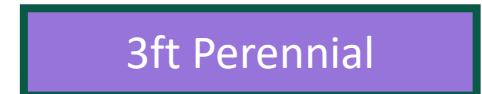
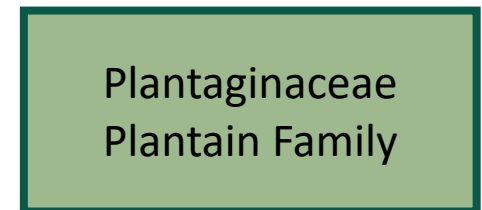
Liliaceae  
Lily Family

4ft Bulbous



# *Linaria purpurea*

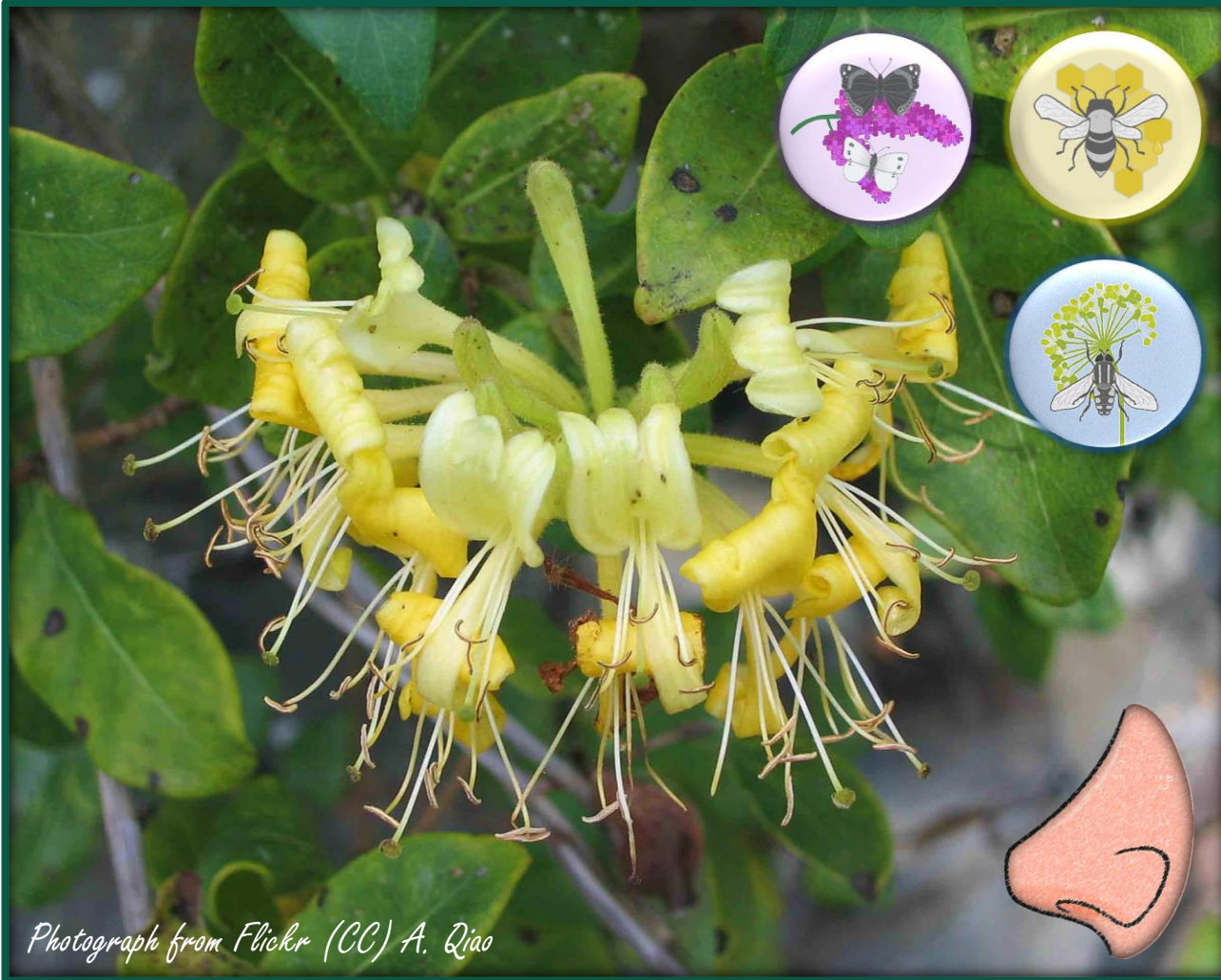
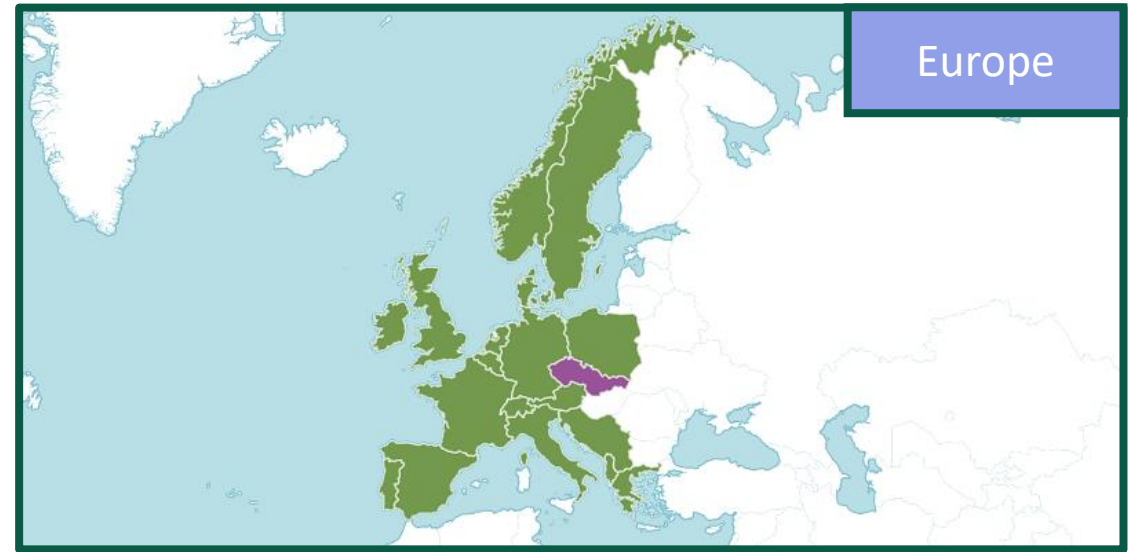
## Purple Toadflax





# *Lonicera periclymenum* European Honeysuckle

UK Native



Photograph from Flickr (CC) A. Qiao

'Graham Thomas'  
'Serotina'



Late Spring  
- Mid Autumn

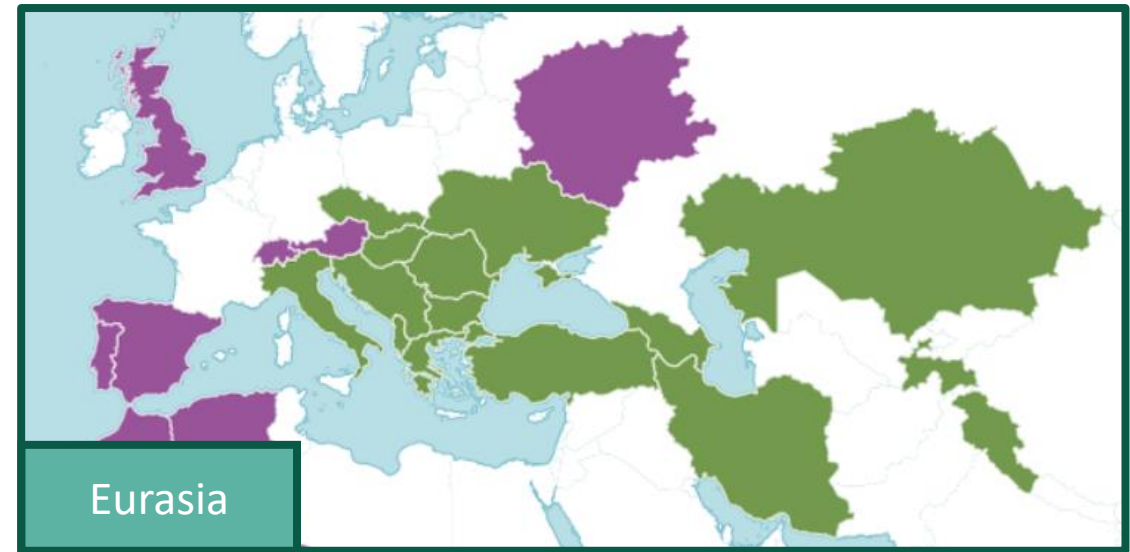
Caprifoliaceae  
Honeysuckle Family

10ft+ Climber/Vine



# *Lychnis coronaria*

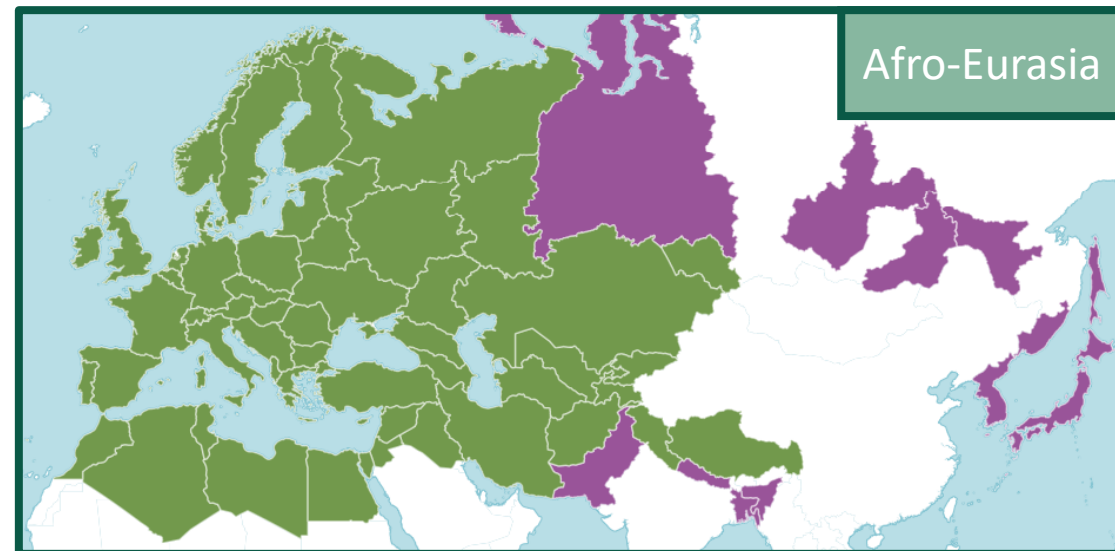
## Rose Campion





# *Malva sylvestris*

## Common Mallow



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Steve Chilton

None



Midsummer  
- Early Autumn

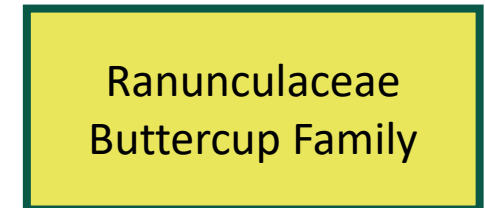
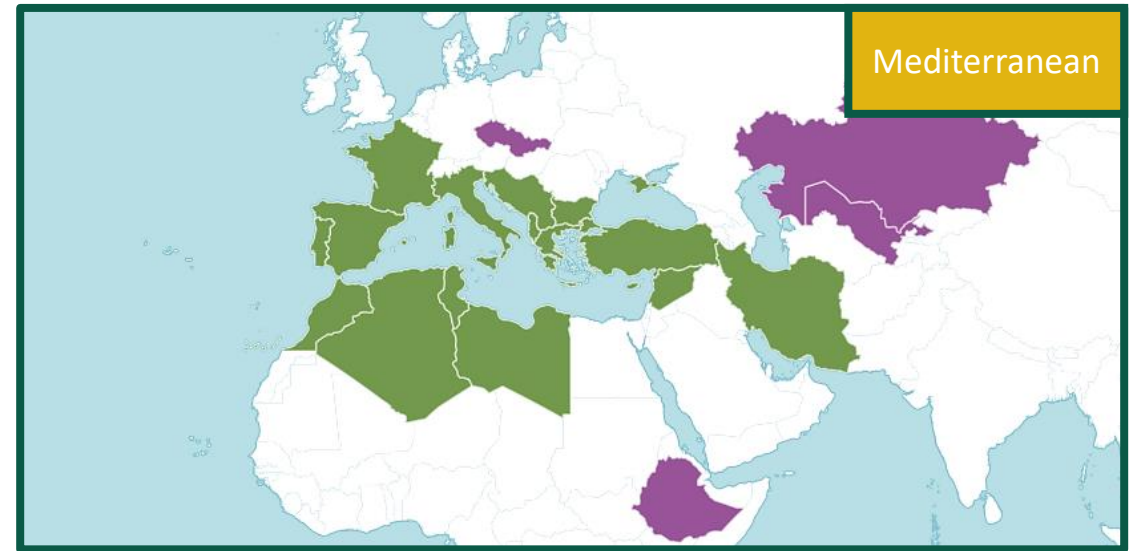
Malvaceae  
Mallow Family

4ft Perennial



# *Nigella damascena*

Love-in-the-Mist





# *Origanum majorana*

## Marjoram





# *Paeonia officinalis*

## Garden Paeony



'Anemoniflora Rosea'

'Coral Charm'

(Hybrid with *P. peregrina*)



Late Spring  
- Early Summer

Paeoniaceae  
Paeony Family

3ft Perennial

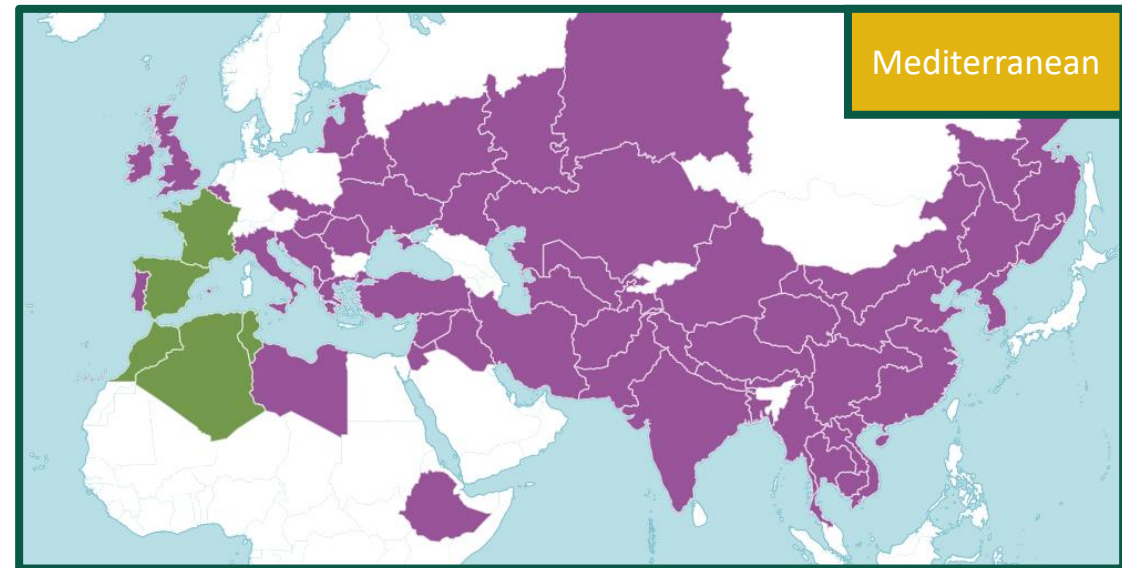


# *Papaver somniferum*

## Opium Poppy



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Aaron Stidwell



\* Dry Seeds edible ('poppy seeds'), all other parts of the plant are poisonous



# *Phlomis russeliana*

## Turkish Sage



*Photograph from Flickr (CC) Steve James*



Anatolia

-Species-



Midsummer  
- Early Autumn

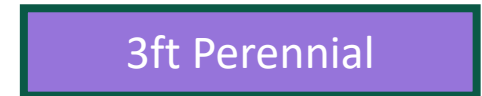
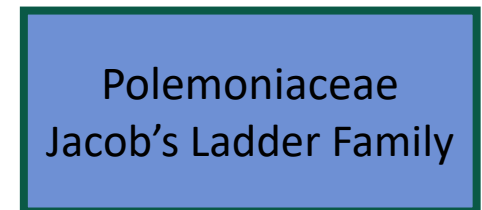
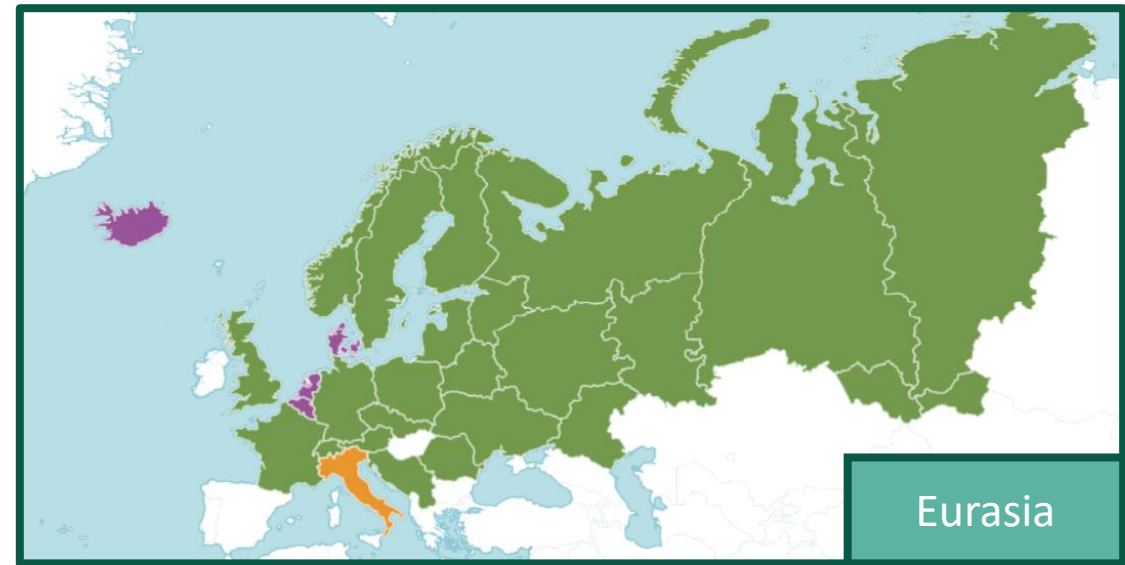
Lamiaceae  
Mint Family

3ft Perennial



# *Polemonium caeruleum*

## Jacob's Ladder



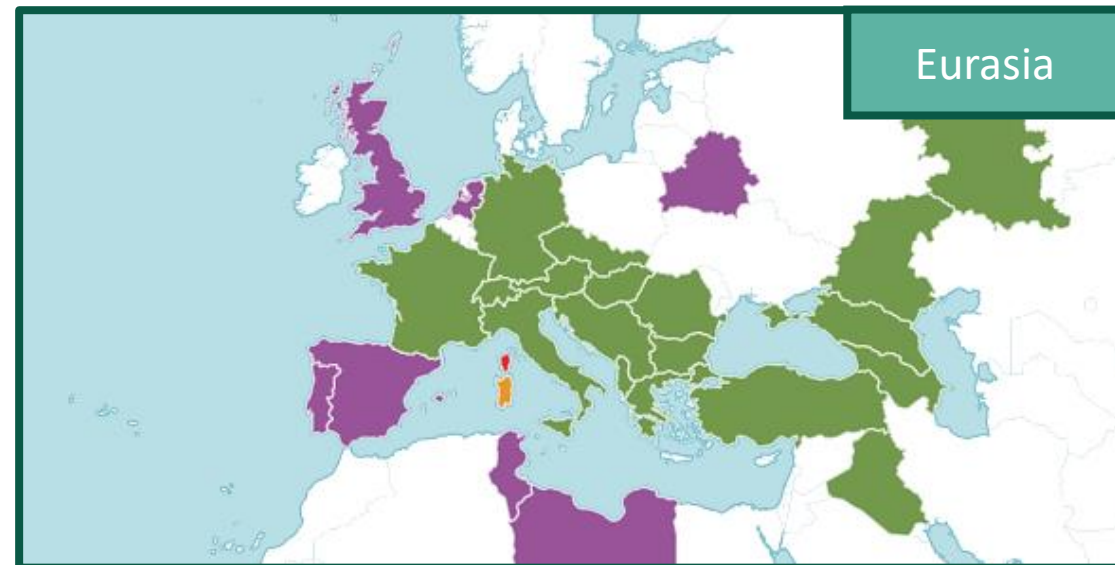


# *Rosa gallica*

Rosa-mundi, French Rose



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Tim Waters



*var. officinalis*  
'Versicolor'



Summer ☀

Rosaceae  
Rose Family

Small Shrub

Only one rose has been included on the list but there are thousands of varieties to choose from. Usually, only single-flowered cultivars are good for pollinators but, as long as the garden is full of pollinator-friendly flowers, it won't hurt to grow some favourite double varieties such as 'Gertrude Jekyll'



# *Salvia nemorosa*

## Balkan Clary



Photograph from Wikipedia (CC) Nicholas Turland



'Plumosa' 'Amethyst'  
'Carradonna'



Midsummer  
- Early Autumn

Lamiaceae  
Mint Family

3ft Perennial

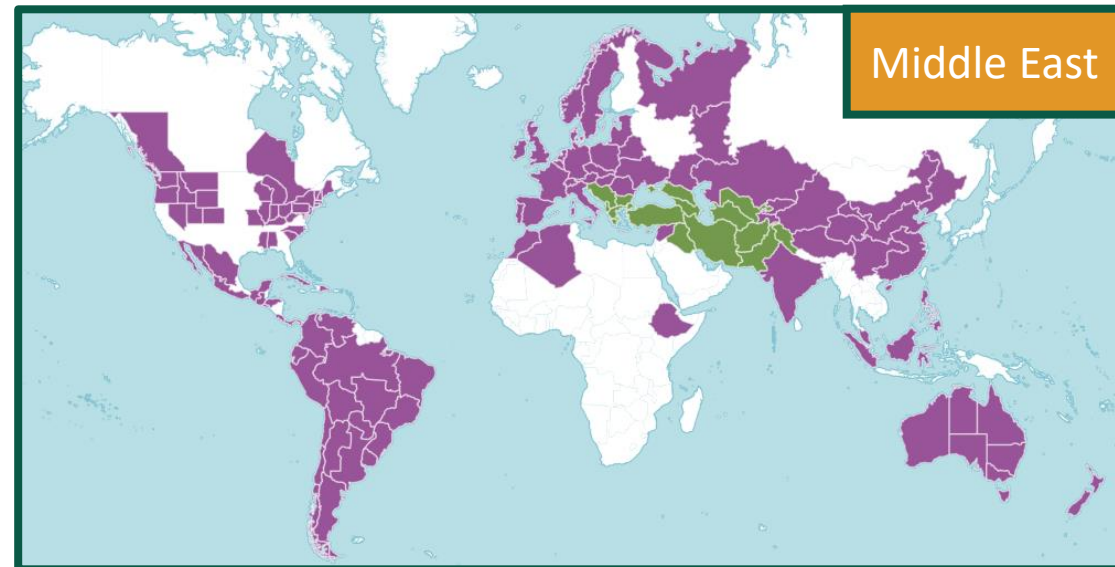


# *Tanacetum parthenium*

## Common Feverfew



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Cheryl Binstock



Middle East



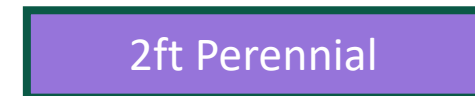
Potentially  
'Aureum'



Summer ☀



Asteraceae  
Daisy Family

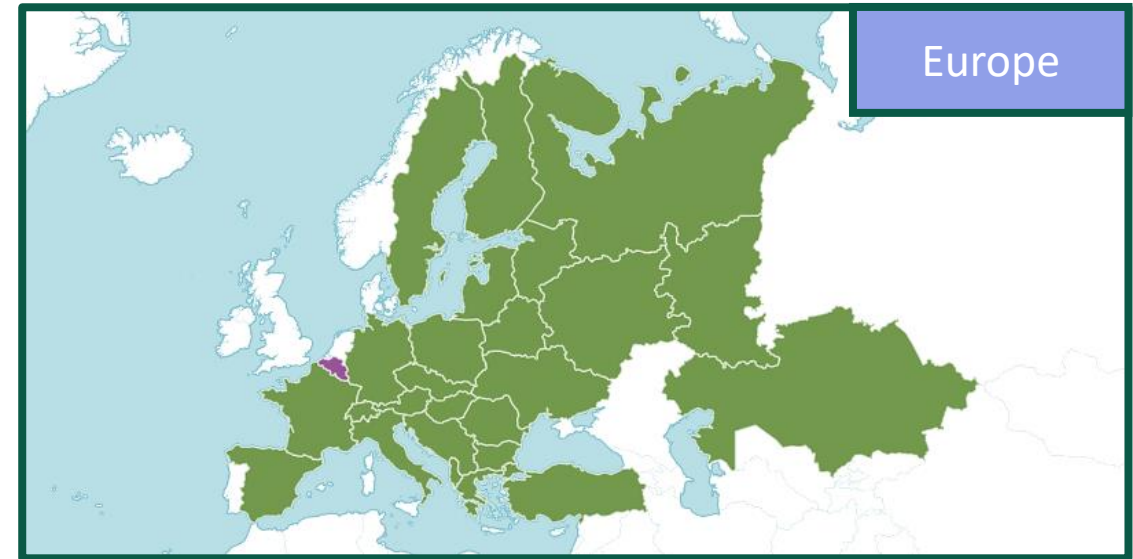


2ft Perennial



# *Thalictrum aquilegiifolium*

## Greater Meadow-Rue



'Black Stockings'  
'Thundercloud'



Summer ☀

Ranunculaceae  
Buttercup Family

3ft Perennial



# *Verbascum nigrum*

## Black Mullein



Photograph © Thomas McBride

'Cotswold series'  
'Tropic Sun'



Early Summer  
- Early Autumn

Scrophulariaceae  
Figwort Family

4ft Biennial



# *Veronica longifolia*

## Garden Speedwell



Late Summer  
- Mid Autumn

Plantaginaceae  
Plantain Family

4ft Perennial



# *Viola tricolor*

## Heartsease



Photograph from Flickr (CC) Ettore Balocchi



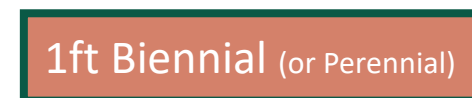
'Jackanapes'  
'Blue Moonlight'



Late Spring  
- Early Autumn



Violaceae  
Violet Family



1ft Biennial (or Perennial)