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CHRISTMAS

## planting anemones for spring

Posted in [All Gardening Advice](#), [Bulbs](#), [September](#) on 1st September 2019

How to plant anemones for spring

- Anemones have strange-looking bulbs or tubers, like a craggy lump of earth. They hate to dry out completely, so they are best planted in autumn when quite newly lifted and still damp.
- If they feel bone-dry, soak them in a bucket of water overnight and they will double in size and grow away more quickly.
- For these small-growing anemones, plant them on their longest side, rather than flat, about 2 in. deep and 3 in. apart.
- The *Anemone blanda* group likes good drainage, in light shade with loose, leafy soil so, when planting dense areas, try to mix in plenty of leaf mould.
- The wood anemone (*A. nemorosa*) prefers a dampish soil, thick with the organic matter that you'd expect to find on the floor of a deciduous wood, so add lots of leaf mould to their planting area, too.
- Anemone blanda 'White Splendour' and 'Robinsoniana' in particular are excellent forced in pots for the house and make lovely table centres.
- They're also good in pots or beds in a cool greenhouse or conservatory where they should flower by early February. If kept cool, a pot looks good for more than a month.

Planting [anemones](#) in your spring garden will join up the dots and colour in the background between various dominant, showy bulbs. You can create a look in which the plants and shrubs all feel completely threaded together, with hardly a patch of bare ground, every inch colonised over the years by plants.

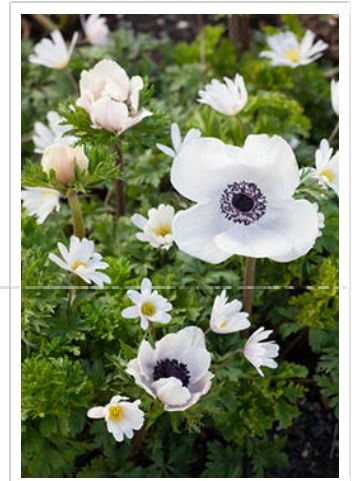
Instead of thinking of gardening as buying, planting anemones creates a garden as 'being', one that gives a sense that the garden is beyond your intervention, that the plants have evolved and worked things out between themselves.

Anemone power

To jump to that look, I'm planting huge numbers of anemones this autumn – not the showy, large-flowered florist's *Anemone coronaria*, but the smaller *Anemone nemorosa*, *Anemone ranunculoides* and *Anemone blanda*, with some hybrids in between. Planting these small anemones is the cheapest, quickest way to create a delicate, calm, undulating spring ground cover, in sun or shade.

For the first, slightly shady area, I'm planting a couple of bagfuls of the wild wood anemone, *A. nemorosa* (AGM). This is one of the earliest spring flowers you can grow, and a brilliantly uplifting sight after the dark days of winter – pure, simply pretty and cheerful. The flowers are white, often washed pink and they look good for ages, flowering throughout March and well into April. The foliage disappears quickly and neatly after flowering and, unlike [bluebells](#), doesn't leave a chunky great seedpod to contend with in any later planting scheme.

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- Wood anemones have a wide pH tolerance, occurring in the wild on almost all types of soil so, once in, they should do well.
- The one downside is that they are very slow colonisers, so the more you can put in at the outset, the better the impact will be for many years.
- The seed is rarely fertile so the plants spread by the very slow growth of their root structure "at a snail's pace – no more than 6ft each 100 years" (Richard Mabey, author of *Flora Britannica*).
- With all anemones, if you want to pick them, sear the stem ends in boiling water for 15 seconds and they last – and hold their petals – for nearly a week.

#### Faster results

If you want quick cover but equally sweet, delicate flowers, then the *Anemone blanda* varieties are for you. The blue-flowered form of *A. blanda* in particular readily self-sows. I first had these in a pot on the doorstep outside my office at Perch Hill, and from that small pot, now five years on, most of the spring Oast garden is a sea of blue. The seeds blow around and settle into any chink in your planting, taking hold and then gently spreading from there.

There is also the pure white *A. blanda* 'White Splendour' (AGM) which I love for picking, with whorly Catherine wheel flowers twice the size of the first two. And while we're talking picking, you must grow just a few of the more expensive, but extraordinary, green-flowered *A. nemorosa* 'Virescens' (AGM), where all the petals have turned into highly and elegantly divided, green-edged, crimson bracts like miniature angelica leaves, laid one on top of another. This is the perfect foliage backdrop to a mini posy of polyanthus and crocus in a small sherry glass.

#### Choice varieties

On top of the straightforward wood anemone varieties, all worth growing, there are some elegant and desirable rarities to keep your eyes peeled for.

*Anemone nemorosa* 'Robinsoniana' (AGM) are taller and generally showier than most wood anemones, in a delicious Farrow and Ball-style duck-egg blue. This form, named after the wild gardening pioneer William Robinson, looks wonderful in drifts in thin grass below shrubs and trees with both primroses and cowslips.

As a child, I spent several Easter holidays in Asolo, a hill town on the edge of the Dolomites in Italy. There the woods were often full, not of the white anemone, but of the pale buttercup yellow, *A. ranunculoides*. This has taller, thinner stems, with the leaves finer and higher on the stem. A lovely thing too, perfect against the backdrop of fallen, coppery leaves with the odd dappled, silver-green leaf of *Cyclamen hederifolium*. I have real affection for this plant and the unsalted butter-yellow of its hybrid with *Anemone ranunculoides*, the pale and delicious, *Anemone x lipsiensis* 'Pallida'.

So now, in early autumn, is your moment to plant one or all of these bulbs to provide the linking carpets between bright and pale, large and small throughout your spring garden.



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