

The Archibald Archive – Genus Guides

ALLIUM

This large, diverse genus of bulbs in Liliaceae** has its devotees but many gardeners have still to join those who fully appreciate its qualities and potential. About 700 species are spread throughout the Northern Hemisphere with the main concentrations in Europe, Southwest Asia and Central Asia. There is an important secondary centre in western N America. While we list a representative range from all these areas, we certainly do not aim for completeness. Many species have little horticultural value and we concentrate on a few of the most garden-worthy. Our own particular interest is in the small Section *Acanthoprason*. We collaborate with European enthusiasts such as Norman Stevens, Janis Ruksans and Arnis Seisums to make some of the most unusual and beautiful species available. Our mentor with the Californian species was the late Jim Robinett.

Most of those which will grow in the open garden will enjoy a situation in a well-drained site in full sun in the UK, where they tend to be more successful in alkaline soils in the more continental climate of eastern Britain, rather than in the wetter, more equable climate of the West but this is quite an adaptable genus on the whole. Although several we list are easily grown, accommodating garden-plants, we do not offer any species likely to become a nuisance under average garden conditions. Many we list are choice plants requiring careful cultivation in bulb-frame or alpine-house conditions in wet climates. Unlike many dry-climate genera, seed is of comparatively short viability and, though most germinate well, some of these choice species can be irregular in germination.

Nomenclature: We usually follow the names used in the accounts of this genus in 'The European Garden Flora', 'Flora Europaea' 'Flora Iranica' and 'Flora of Turkey'. For most North American species, we follow 'The Jepson Manual' (1993) and for Chinese species, use the names in 'Flora of China' (Flora Online). Our friend Arnis Seisums is a world authority on Section *Melanocrommyum* and is always helpful with sorting out nomenclatural problems with the genus as a whole.

** In the APG III classification system, *Allium* is placed in the family Amaryllidaceae, subfamily Allioideae (formerly the family Alliaceae).

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/boj.2009.161.issue-2/issuetoc>