


GAILLARDIA

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Introduction

Few wildflowers ignite a summer garden like Gaillardia. Named after an 18th-Century French botanical patron, this North and South American native dazzles gardens with rings of crimson, gold, and burnt orange. Its common name, the blanket flower, echoes the vivid patterned wool blankets woven by Indigenous peoples of the Great Plains region, whose palette the flower so brilliantly mirrors.

But long before European settlers arrived, many Indigenous nations used Gaillardia for medicinal purposes, such as skin irritations and fevers. After their arrival, Spanish missionaries in the Southwest prized it as a low-care source of enduring color. By the Victorian era, British and French breeders crossed the annual genus of Gaillardia with the perennial genus, producing the beloved garden hybrids which are still widely popular today.

Part of why these plants are so popular is due to the fact that they are mostly native to prairies and dry meadows. Plants range from compact annuals perfect for containers to robust perennials that spread into impressive clumps. But what unites them all is an almost reckless love of the sun, disdain for rich soils, and an extraordinarily tolerance of heat and drought.



Native Pollinator Powerhouse

Most gardeners grow Gaillardia for its looks. But beneath those dazzling petals lies one of the most ecologically generous wildflowers in the Americas. Gaillardia feeds an astonishing range of native insects, birds, and small mammals across its extraordinarily long season.

A single mature plant can produce several thousand individual florets across a season, each offering pollen and nectar. The florets in the central ‘button’ open in an outward spiral over many days, presenting fresh pollen continuously rather than all at once. This strategy makes gaillardia especially valuable to native bees requiring reliable, sequential food sources throughout the summer.

Key Pollinators Supported by Gaillardia	
Bumble bees	Primary pollinators; visit throughout the day.
Sweat bees	Small native bees; highly efficient.
Longhorn bees	Specialists that time emergency to composite flowers.
Monarch butterflies	Use nectar as fuel during autumn migration.
Painted lady & fritillary butterflies	Significant visitors from July-September.
American goldfinch	Harvests seed heads; disperses seed in late summer.



Growing Tips & Care

Gaillardia is a famously forgiving plant, but a few insights can help you transform a good planting into a spectacular one. The single most important rule - do not over-love it! Rich soil, heavy fertilizer, and overwatering can cause floppy stems and early death faster than anything else.

Soil & Site Preparation

- Full sun is non-negotiable! Gaillardia needs a minimum of 6 hours, 8+ is ideal.
- Amend heavy clay with pea gravel for sharp drainage.
- Avoid compost or fertilizer at planting. Lean soil = stronger plants!
- Tolerates a mildly alkaline soil. Amend as needed.
- The number one killer of Gaillardia in the PNW is wet winter soil! If possible, plant on a slight slope or in a raised bed so crowns never sit in standing water during freeze-thaw cycles.

Seed Starting

- Sow seeds 6-8 weeks before the last frost indoors, pressing seeds lightly onto barely moist, well-draining mix.
- Germination occurs in 10-20 days at 65-70°F. Harden off seedlings for one week.

Watering, Feeding, & Deadheading

- Once established, only water during extended dry spells. But new transplants will need regular moisture for 4-6 weeks.
- Remove spent blooms regularly to extend the flowering season.
- In midsummer, cut the entire plant back by $\frac{1}{3}$ to refresh and rebranch!
- If supporting wildlife, leave the seed heads - local birds will be grateful.
- In cold climates, mulch crowns lightly after the ground freezes.

Division

- Perennial Gaillardia benefits from division every 2-3 years.
- Divide in early spring as new growth emerges - replant vigorous outer sections; discard woody centers.

A Guided Tour of the Gaillardia Genus

With roughly 30 species and dozens of cultivars, Gaillardia offers a remarkable variety.

Gaillardia aestivalis

- Slender native species from the Southeast United States.
- Smaller flowers, airy habit.
- Tolerates partial shade.
- Ideal for wildflower plantings.

Gaillardia aristata

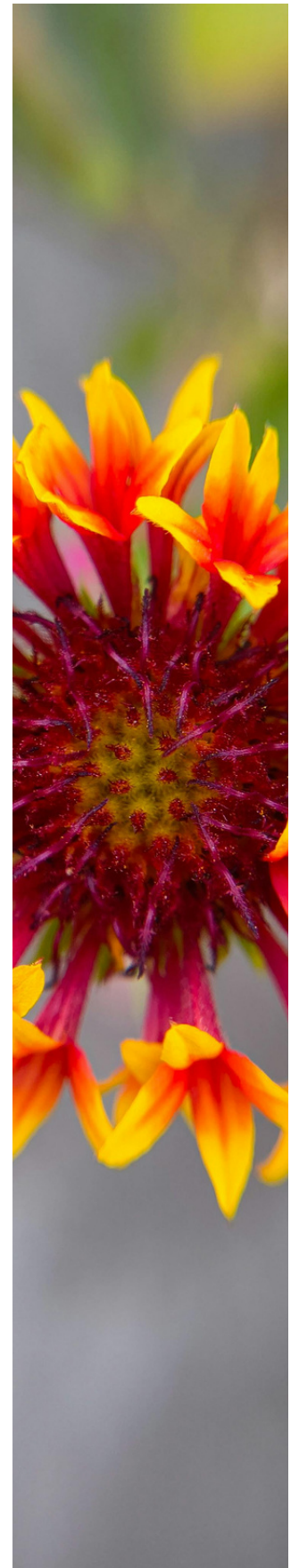
- Native perennial of the North American northern plains and Rocky Mountain regions.
- Grows 24-36" tall.
- Hardy to Zone 3.
- Parent of most modern hybrids (x grandiflora).
- Best for naturalistic and prairie plantings.
- Genus of the beloved 'SpinTop' series!

Gaillardia pulchella

- The exuberant species is native across the southern United States and Mexico.
- A short-lived perennial or annual, based on location.
- Heat-tolerant and self-sows freely in warmer climates.
- Hardy to Zone 5.

Gaillardia x grandiflora

- The workhorse hybrid!
- Perennial in Zones 3-10.
- Larger flowers, longer bloom season, and greater vigor than either parent.
- Available in dozens of cultivars.



Gaillardia Seasonal Planting Guide: Month-by-Month

January-February
• Start seeds indoors 6-8 weeks before the last frost. • Order bare-root divisions. • Test stored seeds for viability with a damp paper-towel test.
March-April
• Harden off indoor seedlings when nights stay above 40°F. • Divide established perennial clumps as new growth emerges. • Transplant to garden after last frost; water in well.
May-June
• Peak planting season across most of North America! • Begin deadheading once the first flush of blooms fades. • Pinch young plants once to encourage bushier growth.
July-August
• Midsummer cutback; shear plants by 1/3 to stimulate reblooming. • Water deeply but infrequently - drought stress sharpens flower color. • Collect seeds from open-pollinated varieties as heads turn brown.
September-October
• Allow some seed heads to mature for self-seeding and wildlife. • Plant container-grown specimens for excellent autumn establishment. • Apply light gravel mulch around crowns in Zone 5 and below.
November-December
• Cut back perennials by 2-3" after several hard frosts. • Dot NOT mulch with heavy organic matter - crowns must stay dry so they do not rot.

Design Ideas for Gardens

Gaillardia is a designer's dream. Punchy enough to anchor a color scheme, yet relaxed enough to blend into naturalistic plantings without looking stiff or overworked. Lean into its fiery palette rather than fighting it!



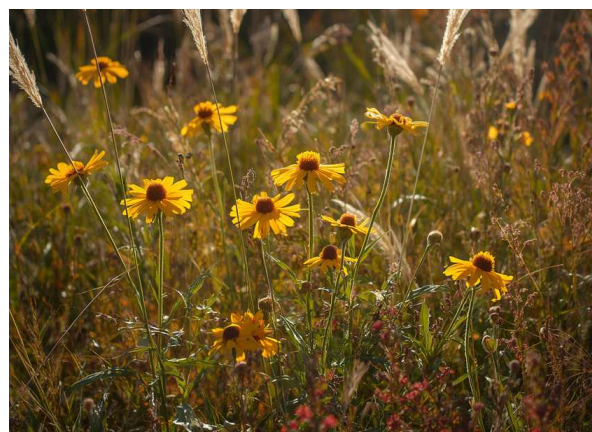
Hot Prairie Drift

Pair red and gold Gaillardia with Rudbeckia 'Goldsturm', Echinacea 'Magnus', and Agastache 'Summerlong Coral'. Back with tall a Miscanthus grass. Peaks from July-October and needs zero irrigation once established.



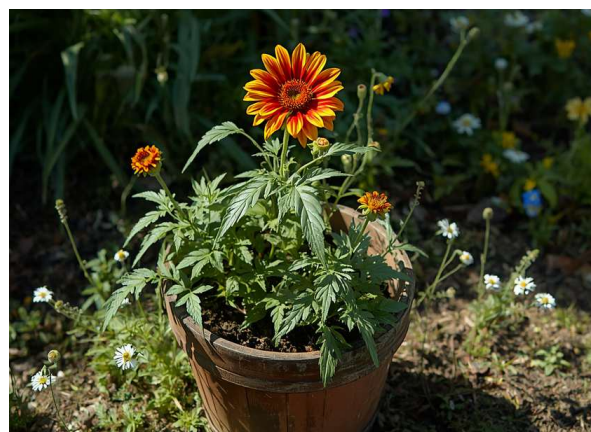
Sunset Cottage Border

Blend 'Spintop Mango' Gaillardia with Achillea 'Moonshine', soft-pink Phlox paniculata, and Nepeta. Warm, but not overwhelming - perfect for a cottage front garden.



Naturalistic Meadow

Scatter Gaillardia aristata through a meadow mix with Ratibida, native grasses, Liatris, and Monarda. Mow once in late winter only. Outstanding ecological value.



Container Showstopper

'Goblin' or 'SpinTop' in terracotta with trailing Calibrachoa and orange Lantana. Water more frequently than in-ground - containers dry fast in summer heat.