

A close-up photograph of a Nepeta plant, showing a central stem with clusters of small, two-lipped purple flowers. The flowers have darker purple or blue markings on their lower lobes. The stems are covered in fine, white, fuzzy hairs. A small, orange and black spotted ladybug is perched on one of the lower flower clusters. The background is a soft, out-of-focus field of similar purple flowers. Two thin white horizontal lines are positioned above and below the central text.

NEPETA

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Nepeta: The Workhouse Perennial That Does It All

Nepeta, commonly known as catmint, stands out as one of the most reliable and versatile perennials available. While it shares a genus with catnip (*Nepeta cataria*), ornamental catmints have been bred for superior garden performance, offering longer bloom periods, neater habits, and more vibrant colors while retaining all the low-maintenance characteristics that make nepetas so beloved.

The magic of Nepeta lies in its ability to thrive where other perennials struggle. It tolerates drought, poor soil, heat, humidity, and even some shade—all while blooming prolifically from late spring through fall. Deer and rabbits avoid it due to its aromatic foliage, making it perfect for gardens plagued by wildlife browsing. The fragrant leaves release a pleasant mint-like scent when brushed, adding a sensory dimension to the garden.

Beyond its toughness, Nepeta offers exceptional aesthetic value. The cloud-like masses of blue-purple flowers create a soft, romantic effect in borders and beds. The plants form neat, mounding habits that work equally well as edging, groundcovers, or mixed border plants. After the initial flush of bloom, a quick shearing promotes rebloom, often resulting in three distinct flowering periods throughout the growing season.

Top Reasons to Grow Nepeta:

- Exceptional drought tolerance once established
- Long blooming period from late spring through fall
- Pollinator magnet attracting bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds
- Deer and rabbit resistant due to aromatic foliage
- Low maintenance requiring minimal fertilization or special care
- Heat and humidity tolerant succeeding in challenging climates
- Versatile uses from groundcovers to border plants
- Excellent cut flowers lasting up to a week in arrangements

Popular Nepeta Varieties

Modern breeding has produced numerous Nepeta cultivars with improved characteristics, including neater habits, longer bloom periods, and enhanced flower colors.

Selection Tip: Choose varieties based on your space and design intent. For formal edging, select compact varieties like 'Blue Wonder.' For billowing masses in mixed borders, opt for 'Walker's Low'. In small gardens where every plant must earn its keep, sterile varieties won't self-seed and require less maintenance.

Nepeta 'Walker's Low'

The gold standard catmint and Perennial Plant of the Year in 2007. Forms a 24-30 inch wide mound of gray-green foliage topped with lavender-blue flower spikes. Despite its name, it grows 18-24 inches tall. Exceptional heat tolerance and extended bloom period. Zones 4-8.

Nepeta faassenii 'Blue Wonder'

Features intense blue flowers and compact 12-15 inch mounding habit. Remarkably floriferous with excellent rebloom. Gray-green aromatic foliage remains attractive all season. Ideal for edging or rock gardens. Zones 3-8.

Nepeta 'Little Trudy'

A charming dwarf selection reaching only 8-12 inches tall and wide, making it perfect for the smallest gardens and front-of-border placements. Features deep lavender-blue flowers that cover the compact mounds from late spring through fall. Non-invasive and tidy habit requires minimal maintenance. Zones 3-8.

Nepeta 'Whispurr Blue'

Features intensely colored, deep blue-purple flowers on compact 10-14 inch mounds. One of the bluest nepetas available, creating stunning color impact in the landscape. Extremely floriferous with overlapping bloom periods that provide nearly continuous color. The tidy, dense habit works beautifully in formal settings or as repeated accents. Zones 3-8.

Seasonal Care Calendar

Nepeta's reputation as a low-maintenance plant is well-deserved, but providing optimal conditions at planting ensures the best performance. Once established, these plants require minimal attention while delivering maximum impact.

Early Spring

Cut back any winter-damaged growth • Apply light compost if desired • Divide overcrowded clumps • Plant new additions

Pro Tip: Correct site selection is key! Nepeta performs best in full sun. While it tolerates partial shade, plants in too much shade become leggy with reduced flowering. Good air circulation is important to prevent fungal issues.

Late Spring/Early Summer

Enjoy first flush of blooms • Monitor for pests (rare) • Begin watering routine for new plants

Pro Tip: The ideal soil is well-drained, moderately fertile, and neutral to slightly alkaline. Catmint tolerates poor soil remarkably well and performs better in lean soil than in overly rich conditions. Heavy clay soil should be amended to improve drainage. Sandy soil benefits from compost to improve water retention.

Midsummer

Shear plants back by one-third after first bloom • Fertilize lightly if needed • Second bloom begins in 2-3 weeks

Pro Tip: During the establishment period, water deeply 2-3 times per week. Once established (usually by the second season), Nepeta is very drought-tolerant and typically requires no supplemental irrigation except during extended dry periods.

Late Summer/Fall

Shear again after the second bloom for a third flush • Reduce watering • Allow seeds to form for birds if desired

Pro Tip: Plant Nepeta in spring or early fall, spacing plants 18-24" apart depending on variety. Dig holes twice as wide as the root ball but no deeper - planting too deep is a common mistake. Water thoroughly after planting and maintain consistent moisture for the first 4-6 weeks until roots establish.

Design Applications

Nepeta's versatility makes it valuable in landscapes. Its soft, billowing habit and cool blue-purple flowers create cohesion and flow in plant combinations, while its toughness ensures success in challenging sites.

Perfect Companion Plants for Nepeta

Achillea, Coreopsis, Echinacea, Ornamental Grasses, Hemerocallis, Iris, Lavandula, Perovskia, Rudbeckia, Salvia

Formal Edging

Compact varieties create perfectly uniform edges along paths, borders, or beds. Their neat, mounding habit requires minimal shearing to maintain crisp lines.

Mixed Perennial Borders

Nepeta serves as a 'weaver' plant, threading through borders and tying together showier perennials. Its cool colors calm hot combinations and provide a steady backdrop for bolder flowers.

Groundcover Masses

On slopes, in difficult dry sites, or as a large-scale cover, Nepeta outperforms most alternatives. Once established, they require virtually no maintenance while providing months of color and pollinator support.

Container Gardens

Compact varieties excel in containers, either as solo specimens or mixed with other sun-lovers. They drape beautifully over container edges and tolerate the dry conditions containers present. Combine with silver-leaved plants and soft yellows for stunning patio displays.



Multiplying Your Catmint Collection

Nepeta is one of the simplest perennials to propagate, making it easy to increase your plantings or share with friends. Several propagation methods provide flexibility depending on timing and available resources.

Division

The most dependable method, division, should be done every 3-4 years to keep plants healthy. Divide in early spring as new growth appears or in early fall, making sure division is at least six weeks before the first frost. Remove the entire clump and use a sharp knife to separate it into sections, ensuring each has multiple shoots and robust roots. Replant the divisions immediately at the same depth, spacing them 18-24" apart. Water thoroughly and keep the soil moist until established.

Pro Tip: Perform division on cool, cloudy days to minimize transplant shock. If you're dividing during hot weather, provide shade for the new divisions for a few days and water them diligently.

Stem Cuttings

In early summer, take 4-6" cuttings from non-flowering stems. Remove the lower leaves, dip the cut ends in rooting hormone (optional, but beneficial), and insert them into moist potting mix or perlite. Keep cuttings in bright, indirect light with consistent moisture. Roots will develop in 2-3 weeks. Once rooted, pot up the cuttings and grow them until they are large enough to transplant.

Pro Tip: The best time to take cuttings is in the morning when plants are fully hydrated. Using a humidity dome or covering the cuttings with a clear plastic bag can enhance success rates.

Seed Propagation

Species nepetas can be easily grown from seed, but named cultivars won't come true and should be propagated vegetatively. Sow seeds indoors 8-10 weeks before the last frost, barely covering them with soil. Seeds typically germinate in 7-14 days at temperatures of 65-70°F. Grow seedlings under lights until outdoor temperatures are stable, then harden them off before transplanting. Most seed-grown plants will bloom in their second year.

Solutions for Healthy Nepeta

While Nepeta is remarkably trouble-free, occasionally issues arise. Most problems stem from environmental conditions rather than pests or diseases and are easily corrected with simple adjustments.

Floppy, Splitting Growth

Cause: Too much nitrogen, insufficient sunlight, or overcrowding.

Solution: Reduce or eliminate fertilization, ensure plants receive daily sun, and shear plants harder after the first bloom to promote compact regrowth.

Powdery Mildew

Cause: High humidity, poor air circulation, overhead watering, or dense shade.

Solution: Water at the soil level, rather than overhead, improve spacing and thin crowded plantings, and in problem areas, infected foliage can be removed.

Reduced Flowering

Cause: Insufficient sunlight, excess nitrogen, lack of shearing, or water stress.

Solution: Ensure full sun exposure, avoid high-nitrogen fertilizers, shear promptly after first bloom, and divide old, congested clumps as needed.

