

Aquilegia



Aquilegia ‘Mrs Scott-elliot Hybrids’

Granny's bonnet

Aquilegias are charming, old-fashioned cottage garden plants with bonnet-shaped flowers, often two-tone and with long, graceful spurs. Sometimes known as columbines or granny's bonnets, they come in a very wide range of colours, from white to pale pink and from dark purple to red.

Flowering in early summer, aquilegias fill the seasonal gap between the last of the spring bulbs and the first of the summer flowers. They self-seed readily, and look wonderful naturalised amongst shrubs and roses, and grow well in shade. However, the plants interbreed freely and seedlings rarely resemble the parents.

Once the aquilegia plants are established, they need very little aftercare. For the best foliage display, cut back the summer growth in September for a late flush of new leaves that should last through the winter.

Cut flowering stems back after the blooms have faded unless you want to collect the seed. Otherwise, your chosen variety may become overcrowded with self-sown seedlings.

Aquilegias, like most perennials, will benefit from being lifted and divided every few years. This makes new, stronger plants and boosts their flowering potential.



Collecting aquilegia seed for propagation

Propagating aquilegias

Aquilegias will self-seed prolifically and cross-fertilise. You may end up with some unique variations in your own garden if you leave the plants to their own devices. Alternatively collect the seed by waiting till the pods have dried a little on the stem. Then cover with a paper bag and shake the dried seedheads to release the very tiny seeds.

Aquilegia downy mildew is a fungal disease particular to these plants. This can spread very quickly given the right conditions – cool and damp. Leaves will show spreading yellow patches that cause the leaf to curl and turn brown, with a white growth on the underside of the leaf. The flowers look distorted and stalks and

seed pods can develop brown blotches. There is no remedy apart from removing affected plants and burning them.



Brown and green flowers of *Aquilegia viridiflora*

Great aquilegia varieties to grow

- *Aquilegia vulgaris* 'Lime Sorbet' – pale limey-white double flowers
- [*Aquilegia vulgaris* var. *stellata* 'Nora Barlow'](#) – one of the oldest varieties, named after Charles Darwin's granddaughter, with pink, green and white petals
- *Aquilegia alpina* – an alpine variety with bright blue flowers, growing to 80cm
- *Aquilegia fragrans* – with pale cream flowers and pineapple scent, this species aquilegia comes from the Himalayan foothills of Pakistan, northern India and Kashmir
- [*Aquilegia viridiflora*](#) – a rare species aquilegia, with chocolate coloured flowers and long spurs