

Ageratum

Susan Mahr, UW Horticulture

What is ageratum? The genus *Ageratum* includes approximately 60 species of annual and perennial herbs and shrubs in the aster family (Asteraceae) that are all native to Central and South America. One species that is commonly used as a bedding plant, *Ageratum houstonianum*, is from Mexico, and is named after William Houston (1695-1733), a Scottish physician who collected the first ageratum plants. The name ageratum is derived from the Greek "a geras", meaning non-aging and refers to the long-lasting nature of ageratum flowers.



Ageratum plants have soft, fuzzy flowers that can be blue, pink, lavender or white.

Wild species of ageratum can grow to over two feet in height and typically reseed themselves liberally. Varieties offered by nurseries and garden centers however are almost all hybrids that are more compact and better behaved. Commercially available ageratum cultivars grow in neat mounds, flowering from late spring through fall. They are one of the more dependable flowering annuals.

Ageratum plants have oval to heart-shaped leaves that are up to two inches long. Flowers of ageratum are typically some shade of blue, but can be pink, lavender or white. The soft, fuzzy flowers are dainty and feathery, often delightfully fragrant, and usually cover plants completely. Each flower cluster consists of five to 15 tubular florets.

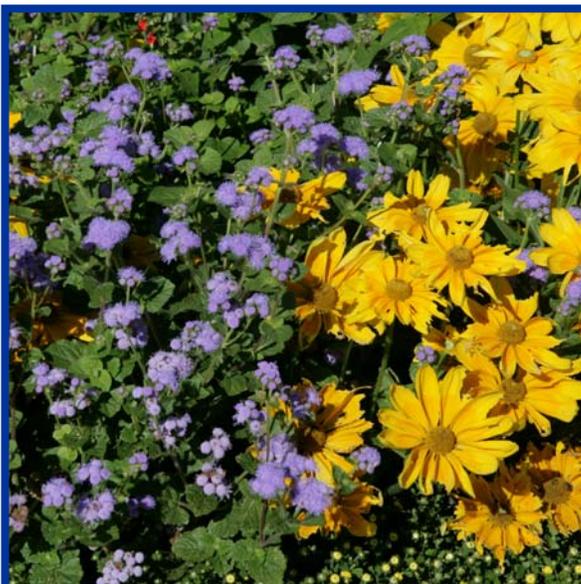
There are many different cultivars of ageratum, including attractive dwarf, tufted plants as well as tall, upright types that can be used as cut flowers.

Most cultivars are propagated from seed, and are predominantly F_1 hybrids (i.e., offspring from crosses of two plants of closely related species or strains of a single species).

- **'Blue Blazer'** was the first commercial F_1 ageratum hybrid. This cultivar has better plant uniformity and vigor, and blooms earlier than open-pollinated cultivars.
- **'Blue Danube'** has compact six to eight-inch-tall plants covered with mid-blue flowers. This cultivar is one of the best varieties for uniformity, earliness and general performance.
- **'Blue Horizon'** is an F_1 hybrid that grows 30 inches tall and produces three-inch clusters of purplish-blue flowers on long stems. This cultivar is great as a cut flower.
- **'Blue Mink'** is an open-pollinated cultivar that grows 12 inches tall and has powder-blue flowers.
- **'Hawaii'** is a series of F_1 hybrids, each of which is dwarf (up to eight inches tall) and compact, with soft pink, royal blue or pure white flowers. Members in this series flower earlier and longer than other varieties.
- **'Pinky'** produces salmon pink flowers on bushy and compact eight-inch-tall plants.
- **'Purple Fields'** is an F_1 hybrid that produces compact, mounded plants that spread up to 12 inches across. This cultivar is covered with unusual, purple flowers.
- **'Summer Snow'** is an F_1 hybrid with fluffy white flowers;
- **'Trinidad'** has a unique, early-blooming blend of white, blue, violet and pink flowers on six-inch-tall plants.

Where do I get ageratum? Ageratum transplants can be purchased at local garden centers. However, ageratum can also be grown very easily from seed. Start ageratum seeds eight to 10

weeks before you would like to transplant them into your garden. Surface sow the seeds, barely covering them with vermiculite or potting mix. Be sure that the seeds receive light to stimulate germination. Germination usually takes seven to 21 days. Transplant the seedlings into trays or pots when they are large enough to handle. Move potted plants outside to harden off and transplant them into the garden when all risk of frost has passed.



Blue-flowered ageratum pairs well in the garden with yellow-flowered ornamentals.

How do I grow ageratum? Transplant ageratum plants six to eight inches apart in a sunny spot. Ageratum prefers a moist, well drained soil, but will also tolerate dry conditions. Ageratum plants generally do not have insect or disease problems, although spider mites can be an issue, especially in hot, dry weather. On most cultivars, old flowerheads turn brown and remain on the plants. Deadhead regularly to improve the appearance of plants and prolong blooming. Some cultivars are self-cleaning (i.e., the flowers fall off naturally). Ageratum plants are sensitive to cold temperatures, so be sure to cover plants on cold nights in the fall to extend their survival.

How do I use ageratum most effectively in my garden? Because of their short stature, most varieties of ageratum are best used for edging or borders of flowerbeds, in rock gardens, or in containers. Blue varieties are particularly attractive when combined in the garden with pink-flowering plants. Combine soft blue-flowering varieties of ageratum with pink

begonias (*Begonia* spp.) for a low, pastel ground cover, or mass them with short yellow marigolds (*Tagetes* spp.) or cockscomb (*Celosia* spp.) for greater contrast. Taller blue varieties of ageratum go well with yellow cosmos (*Cosmos sulphureus*). Also try mixing the powder blue varieties with white petunias (*Petunia* spp.), lamb's ear (*Stachys* spp.) or dark blue lobelia (*Lobelia* spp.).

For more information on ageratum: Contact your county Extension agent.

© 2009 by the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System doing business as the division of Cooperative Extension of the University of Wisconsin Extension. An EEO/Affirmative Action employer. University of Wisconsin Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming, including Title IX and ADA requirements. This document can be provided in an alternative format by calling Brian Hudelson at (608) 262-2863 (711 for Wisconsin Relay).

References to pesticide products in this publication are for your convenience and are not an endorsement or criticism of one product over similar products. You are responsible for using pesticides according to the manufacturer's current label directions. Follow directions exactly to protect the environment and people from pesticide exposure. Failure to do so violates the law.

Thanks to Vijai Pandian, Christine Regester and Ann Wied for reviewing this document.

A complete inventory of University of Wisconsin Garden Facts is available at the University of Wisconsin-Extension Horticulture website: whort.uwex.edu.