

Friday's Feature

By

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Society garlic is one tough plant

Occasionally, gardeners are so captivated with the large, showy plants in their landscape that they lose appreciation for some of the less pompous, and yet just as beautiful "filler" plants. One of these is society garlic.

While other plants are slow to show recovery from this winter's cold gripe, this plant is already on the road to recovery.

Society garlic is known botanically as *Tulbaghia violacea*. *Tulbaghia* is a small genus of about 20 species from southern Africa. The genus is very closely related to *Allium*, and thus a member of the Alliaceae family which includes the onion, garlic, and chives. Typically the *Tulbaghia* species are modest, unassuming plants with small flowers, grassy foliage, sometimes with a pungent skunky or garlic-like scent to the foliage.

The society garlic plant attains a height of slightly less than a foot and this makes it a suitable candidate for use as a foreground or border plant. It is best used for mass plantings in an outdoor garden, making it more visible in the landscape. Due to its garlic odor that some people dislike, a society garlic patch is better located away from the traffic flow and best placed where it can be viewed from a short distance.

It typically has blue-green, grass-like foliage. A variegated cultivar, 'Silver Lace', has white edges giving the foliage a silver appearance.

Clusters of eight to ten flowers sit on top of stems that stand high above the foliage. If grown in full sun, it will bloom from spring until late fall. Most often you will find this plant with lilac-colored flowers but white and pink forms exist.



Society garlic forms clumps. This is a perennial that will spread slowly by its rhizomes, but will not become aggressive. However, as clumps grow in size, the center will occasionally die out. You may find it necessary to dig up and divide clumps every two to three years in early spring.

It is suitable for zones 7-11. Society garlic tolerates moderate frosts and light freezes down to 20° F or so. If damaged by the frost you can either gently remove the dead leaves by hand or cut the entire plant off at ground level.

Society garlic does best in full sun. Plants will grow well in shade, but may not flower much. Plant in well-drained soil; prolonged exposure to waterlogged conditions can cause this plant to rot.

In general, society garlic is a low-maintenance and fuss-free plant to grow. It is considered drought-resistant. However, a drought-resistant plant does not mean that it doesn't have to be watered. Society garlic does better if it is well-watered and allowed to dry out slightly before the next watering.

An extra benefit is that society garlic is considered a “fire-wise” plant, meaning that it is not highly flammable if cared for correctly. In addition, this plant is disliked by deer and therefore suffers only rare or minor damage when deer are present.

Theresa Friday is the Environmental Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

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