

Rotating Extension Article

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The Cat's Meow

One of the most overlooked colors in the landscape is white. During hot summer days a garden with white flowers produces a cool, calming effect. The real show, however, occurs at dusk when the white blossoms luminesce in the twilight. And on those nights with a full moon, white flowers can be magical. One of my favorite white flowering summer plants is Cat's Whiskers.

Cat's Whiskers is a member of the mint family and is native to tropical East Asia. Its scientific name is *Orthosiphon stamineus*. In zone 8, consider this plant an annual since it is tender and will not reliably come back after a freeze. It's a good idea to collect seed in late fall or take stem cuttings to ensure that you continue this plant from year-to-year. It is relatively easy to propagate. In zones 9-11, it can be considered a reliable perennial.

Cat's Whiskers has beautiful dark green leaves and unusual flowers. The flowers may be white or bluish-purple. The blossom consists of an upright spike that contains long flowers and even longer stamens, reminiscent of cat whiskers. Flowering occurs on new growth.

This plant performs best in full sun. It will however grow with several hours of filtered light or spotty direct sun. Cat's whiskers is a shrub-type plant that will reach heights of two to three feet and spreads three to four feet. It is a good choice for English cottage style gardens and mixes well with other perennials. Cat's whiskers are also good container plants providing height and fullness to a mixed pot.

To prepare the soil for Cat's Whiskers, incorporate three to four inches of organic matter into the soil, working it in to a depth of six to eight inches. Regular watering and fertilization is required for this plant to achieve its best performance.

This plant is almost carefree. It does not have any serious pests, diseases or bad habits. Cat's Whiskers does however attract bees, butterflies and hummingbirds making it a good addition to any garden.

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