

# Alpine Plants

High on a mountain is not the friendliest of places for plants to grow. Above the treeline, where trees can no longer survive, the climate is harsh. Some plants, known as alpiners, can survive the lack of water, the cold temperatures, high winds, strong sunlight and poor soil. These are *true* alpine plants. There are similar plants that grow lower down the mountain and in gardening terms any of these hardy low-growing plants, suitable for growing in a rock garden or trough, are also referred to as alpine plants. Many have colourful flowers.

### The Burren – a Haven for Alpine Plants

The unusual landscape of The Burren, Co. Clare, is a unique environment and home to plants that would not normally be found together in the wild. The climate, geology and agricultural practices of the area come together to provide ideal conditions for

Arctic-alpine and Mediterranean plants to live side by side.

Carved out millions of years ago by glaciers, the limestone terraces and pavements of The Burren are filled with crevices and pockets of grassland where alpine species such as Spring Gentian, Bloody Cranesbill and Mountain Avens grow.



Spring Gentian, a plant usually found in alpine meadows in central and southeastern Europe, can also be found in huge sheets in The Burren, Co. Clare.

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Alpine plants are so called as many of them come from the Alps in Central Europe. However it has become a collective name for similar plants found on mountains and sometimes lower lying areas around the world. Above: The Matterhorn, one of the highest mountain peaks in the Swiss Alps.

### Alpine Plants in the Garden

You don't have to live high on a mountain to grow alpine plants. Alpine plants have been collected and propagated for hundreds of years and specimens are widely available in our garden centres and gardens. Many alpine plants need rocky soil and sunny conditions to thrive and these can be recreated in rock gardens, troughs, window boxes or between cracks in the pavement. Being drought resistant, alpine plants are great to grow if regular watering is a problem.

### Fame at last!

One alpine plant was made famous in song - "Edelweiss" through the movie "The Sound of Music". Edelweiss is found high in the the Alps, the great mountain range crossing eight European countries. Like other alpine plants, it has adapted to the extreme weather conditions on the mountains. It has a deep roots to anchor it and a felt-like covering on its leaves to protect it from drying out or being damaged by wind or sun.



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