

Indian Blanket flowers perk up any garden

Wouldn't it be nice to find a beautiful, flowering plant that bloomed all summer and could handle harsh, dry conditions? Gaillardias, also known as Indian Blanket or Firewheel, make a sturdy and colorful addition to borders and beds. They are low maintenance and attractive to humans and butterflies alike.

Gaillardia pulchella is one of the most hardy, colorful plants that will be offered on January 9th at the Air Potato Exchange Day. It is known for its colorful, daisy-like flowers. The large center is a dark rose color with petals of yellow, orange, crimson or copper scarlet. These plants are excellent for flowerbeds or pots. They bloom profusely and need very little maintenance.

The plant is named for the 18th century French magistrate, M. Gaillard de Charentonneau, who was deemed a patron of botany. The common name of Indian Blanket is taken from the blanket type patterns they make when planted in the ground, which resemble blankets made by Native Americans. Gaillardia is in the Asteraceae family and its blooms measure about 2-3 inches across.

The perennial plant forms wiry, branched stems that form into mounds which can be anywhere from 8 – 24 inches high and can spread throughout the planted area. The plant has a hairy stem which branches out and becomes woody at the base. They do well in sandy areas and are even tolerant of salt, which is why they are often seen along borders near beaches. The leaves are lanceolate to linear basal and the plant produces bright, daisy like blooms in shades of red, yellow, buff and brown.

To plant Gaillardia it is best to space them 15 – 18 inches apart. They grow best in full sun with lots of light and well drained soil. These plants love the heat and thrive in warm temperatures. They require only moderate watering and fertilization. They can be reproduced from picking off the dead heads and collecting seed for planting. Indian Blankets will bloom the first year they are planted. For best results, keep flowers trimmed off as they die and the plant will continue to bloom from about mid June until temperatures begin to lower.

For color in the house, Gaillardia makes a great cut flower as well. The cut blooms usually last about a week in water and are a colorful way to add variety to a mix.

Bina Flower Moth larvae and other types of moth larvae feed on the plant. In addition, it is attractive to various butterflies as a nectar source. White tail deer have been seen nibbling on the leaves of this attractive plant and the seeds are taken by small ground feeding birds, notably goldfinches.

Indian blanket is a major wildflower of the prairies and meadows. It reseeds readily and is easy to grow; good drainage is the only requirement. Rich soils will produce large, floppy plants with few flowers. This is an excellent choice for gardeners who want some color in their gardens with very little maintenance. It is ideal in our sandy soils and in drought conditions. This plant is a great addition to any garden.