



Cleomes offer reliable drama in the late season garden. The tall, stately plant is often called “spider flower” after the spider-like seedpods that explode outwards from the tall stems as the flowers mature. The old-fashioned open-pollinated cleome typically served as a back-of-the-border plant, with a height of 5 feet or more. Newer hybrids, smaller and bushier versions of the original, are now an option for smaller gardens. Flower colors range from pure white to deep purple. They are a favorite of hummingbirds.

Sow cleome seeds in full sun. Like many plants, they prefer fertile, well-drained soil, but they are tolerant of a wide range of conditions. They thrive in the heat of summer.

1. Prepare. Loosen soil to a depth of 6 to 8 inches using a shovel or fork, and mix in some compost to improve the soil structure and drainage. Fertilize lightly with a slow-release fertilizer. Rake the soil smooth, removing any large clumps and rocks.

2. Plant. Sow Cleome seeds directly in the garden in spring, about 4-6 inches apart; cover seeds lightly with soil and press gently. Their impact is greatest when they are planted in groups of five or more.

3. Grow. Water the soil to keep it moist for a week or two, until seeds germinate. Once seedlings are a few inches tall, thin them by removing extra plants so the remaining ones are at least 1 foot apart. Pull weeds that sprout nearby, and apply organic mulch, such as bark chips, to control weeds and conserve soil moisture. Tall varieties may need staking, especially if located in a windy site; position stakes when the plants are about 2 feet tall.

4. Enjoy. Cleomes flower from spring through frost.



AT A GLANCE



Exposure: Full sun

Planting time: After danger of frost.

Planting depth: 1/4 inch deep

Spacing in row: Sow 4 to 6 inches apart; thin to 12 to 18 inches apart.

Time to flower: 70 to 80 days from seed.



Shorter varieties of cleome, such as the Sparkler series, can be planted in large containers.