

The Genus *Erysimum*, the Wallflowers

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Wallflowers are one of the classic early blooming perennials whose flowers signal that spring is finally here. All types of *Erysimum* are extremely fragrant, produce flowers in a wide range of colors from yellow to orange and red to bronze. Though many are short lived, reseeding perennials and biennials, in our mild winter Pacific Northwest climates, most wallflowers keep their foliage all winter long. Fastidious and regular deadheading rewards the gardener with a tidy plant that blooms in spring, summer and occasionally into early fall, and may even persist many years.

Cultivation and Continued Care

Erysimums prefer alkaline, well drained soils. Full sun creates the best shape and form; too much shade and wallflowers flop over and lose their tight, erect or mounding habit. Wallflowers have different uses in the landscape depending on variety and growth habit. Some work well in the mixed perennials garden. Lower growing varieties that reach only about 12" tall are best in the front of the border. Creeping or mat-forming varieties work well as groundcovers and may even be used in soil pockets in rock walls.

***Erysimums* and Their Uses in the Landscape**

Erysimum 'Bowles' Mauve' is one of the tallest and one of the more commonly available wallflowers. As the name implies, mauve flowers are produced on flower spikes approaching 3 feet tall without deadheading. *E.* 'Bowles' Mauve is typically lives less than five years, but regular deadheading, as with most wallflowers, produces a slightly shorter plant that may live longer. *E.* 'Wenlock Beauty' looks similar to *E.* 'Bowles' Mauve, but stays under 2 feet tall, and seems to persist longer in the garden.

The species *E. cheiri* is another taller growing wallflower produces very fragrant flowers in the full range of *Erysimum* colors besides mauve, i.e. yellow, orange, red, cream, burgundy sometimes veined or bicolor. Most cultivars of *E. cheiri* are bred for shorter more compact plants great for containers or the front of the border. For instance, the 'Bedder Series' are compact plants to 12" tall.

E. linifolium 'Variegata' is another spectacular, taller growing variegated wallflower reaching over 2 feet tall. Flowers open a light pink-apricot and mature to a mauve color on spikes above bright light green and cream

variegated foliage. Again, as with most wallflowers, deadhead for a more compact, tighter plant with a longer life span.

My favorite is the Siberian wallflower, *E. x allionii*, (syn. *E. alpinum*) which is one of the first perennials to bloom in spring. Bright, soft, fragrant orange flowers illuminate the landscape during those cloudy early spring days. One of the larger *Erysimums*, the Siberian wallflower reaches over 2 feet tall and wide, and will become quite sprawling and untidy without deadheading. However, it is one of the most reliably cold hardy wallflowers, even for eastern Washington gardens.

E. 'Golden Jubilee' is one notable compact cultivar. Sunny, fragrant, yellow flowers stand out on top of dark green mounding foliage to about 12" tall. Another tidy, colorful, compact wallflower for the front of the border is *E.* 'John Codrington' which produces yellow flowers tinted bronzy-purple.

The creeping wallflower, *E. kotschyanum*, produces dense linear leaves topped with small, fragrant light orange flowers. Not as long-blooming as most *Erysimums*, this wallflower works well in dry soil pockets in rock walls, producing a cascade of color in late spring and early summer. It also tolerates light foot traffic among pavers and stepping stones. Another creeping wallflower, *E.* 'Orange Flame' is listed as more cold hardy (Zone 4), but appears, to me as indistinguishable from *E. kotschyanum* (Zone 6).

Summary

Wallflowers are one of the classic heralds of spring. Fragrant flowers typically bloom over a long period of time beginning in early spring and occasionally into fall. Taller growing wallflowers work well in the mixed perennial garden; more compact varieties display best at the front of the border; use creeping *Erysimums* in rock gardens and along pathways. Read the plant tag!

Provide full sun and well-drained, alkaline soil for best growth results. Most wallflowers are short-lived perennials or biennials. However, regular deadheading will reward the gardener with a better shaped and longer lived plant.