Scabiosa caucasica F.A.M. von Bieberstein
(Scabiosa goldingensis)

Pincushion Flower

Other Common Names: Caucasian Scabious.
Family: Dipsacaceae.
Cold Hardiness: Useful as a perennial in USDA zones 4(3) through 7; this species can be effective as a winter or transition annual in warmer climates.

Foliage: Opposite; simple, 1 to 3 or more; lanceolate to nearly linear at the base; coarsely lobed on basal leaves, leaves on the flower stalks are more extensively and narrowly lobed than the basal leaves; upper leaves appearing nearly bipinnate; the venation is pinnate with the main veins raised beneath; leaf colors are dark green to bluish green; sometimes glaucous; no fall color develops were plants die to the ground in winter.

Flower: The inflorescence is a 2 to 3 diameter involucrate head of flowers; matted gray hairs cover the involucrum from which lanceolate green bracts radiate beneath the flowers; the head is a flattened dome with tiny individual flowers in the center grading to larger ones up to \( \frac{1}{2} \) diameter on the outer edges; flowers have five petals; the corolla is markedly two-lipped on the outer flowers of the head, with the two upper petals reduced in size compared to the three petals of the lower lip; trademark gray pin-like stamens protrude from the inner flowers; the overall effect is suggestive of a pincushion, hence the plant’s common name; most cultivars have various shades of blue flowers, but whites are also available; in cooler zones flowers occur in late spring to summer; in our region, flowering is during cooler months.

Fruit: The fruit is a tiny achene with a persistent calyx; it is not ornamental and old flowers should be deadheaded to promote return bloom.

Stem / Bark: Stems — tightly spaced internodes occur on the rosette stems, whereas long broadly spaced nodes are present on the flower stalks; stems are rounded in cross-section and stiff and brittle when broken; the green stems are covered in tiny stiff white hairs; Buds — buds are foliose, green covered in tiny whitish hairs, are \( \frac{1}{32} \) long or less, and often elongate soon after formation; Bark — not applicable.

Habit: Flower stalks originate from a basal rosette of foliage and are erect to arching out and up, terminating in an involucrate head of flowers; flower heads are held 12 to 18 (24) above the ground and plants spread 12 to 18 across; the overall texture is medium to medium-fine.

Cultural Requirements: Plants will flower best in a sunny location during cooler portions of the year, but will last longer into summer with afternoon shade; this species is adapted to a soil pH ranging from slightly acidic to slightly alkaline; good drainage and reasonable fertility are necessary for good growth; deadheading will extend the effective flowering season.

Pathological Problems: Slugs can be problematic in cool wet weather.

Ornamental Assets: In our region, the showy blue flowers in cool seasons are the primary asset.

Limitations & Liabilities: Short-lived in warm humid climates; even in the Midwest it is usually a two to four-year sort of perennial.

Landscape Utilization: Cool (southern portions of our region) or transition (northern portions) annual or weak perennial for bedding, accents, mixed annual and perennial borders, or cut flower gardens.

Other Comments: The genus name is derived from the Latin word scabies meaning an itch or scratch, a condition which this species was purported to cure.

Native Habitat: The specific epithet refers to this species native range in the Caucasus Mountains.
**Related Taxa:** Most plants available in our trade are seed propagated cultivars; some of the more popular selections may be of hybrid origin; ‘Butterfly Blue’ is a more free-flowering form that is less prone to quit flowering if not deadheaded.

**Scabiosa atropurpurea** L.  
*Annual Pincushion Flower*  
*(Scabiosa grandiflora, Scabiosa nana)*

- Also known as Egyptian Rose, Mourning-Bride, Mournful Widow, Pincushion Flower or Sweet Scabious; brighter pinks, rose, and wine colored flowers are available in *S. atropurpurea* than are found with *S. caucasica*, however, *S. atropurpurea* is an annual species and it tends to be more erect in habit than *S. caucasica*; the leaves of *S. atropurpurea* are broader and more oblong-spatulate with coarse dentate teeth on the margins compared to the more linear-lanceolate leaves of *S. caucasica* which has margins that are mostly entire except for the pinnate lobing.

- The species type produces smaller dome-shaped 1½O to 2O diameter heads than *S. caucasica*, but some cultivars, such as ‘Giant Imperial Mixed’, can have larger 3O to 4O diameter heads.

- This species is best reserved for cut flower gardens or in mixed plantings where shorter plants can be used to hide the basal foliage; flowering stalks reach 1N to 3N in height; this species is perhaps ornamental inferior to *S. caucasica*, but does offer an alternative color range for cut flowers.


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