

WOOD ANEMONES

There is charm in the simple form of an anemone, and the diversity of plants in the wild has provided rich pickings for enthusiasts

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Anemone nemorosa 'Royal Blue'
One of the best blue-flowered cultivars. It holds its deep-blue colour throughout its life, without fading to pink. It flowers prolifically. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b[†].



John Hoyland is a plantsman and garden writer who has gardens in both southeast England and southwest France.

My indispensable reference for spring flowers is a tattered copy of EA Bowles's *My Garden in Spring*. Although he was writing a century ago, the advice is always pertinent. Furthermore, he writes with an irresistible passion and humour. 'There is a charm,' he says at the opening of a chapter, 'in the simple form of a single *Anemone* that goes straight to my heart.'

Bowles was referring to a range of genera that carpet woods, copses and shady gardens in spring. Individually, the plants are elfin and demure but en masse, sparkling in the spring sunlight, they are a thrilling sight and the first portent of the season's exuberance.

The principal member of the group is *Anemone nemorosa*, a British native that you would miss if you went looking for it in the woods on a grey day because the flowers close up when the skies are cloudy. As soon as the sun appears the flowers open wide and face upwards to bask in the light and warmth. The plant spreads by a system of thin, twig-like rhizomes that push through the leaf-litter on the woodland floor.

In most parts of the country the flowers are white but in central England many blue forms occur, and in Ireland blue forms often predominate. Nobody consciously breeds *Anemone nemorosa*, but the diversity of plants in the wild has provided rich pickings for eagle-eyed plant enthusiasts, and dozens of selections have been named.

Typical of woodland plants, *Anemone nemorosa* grows quickly at the beginning ▶

PLANT PROFILE

What A group of shade-loving herbaceous perennials composed of several genera, although *Anemone nemorosa* is possibly the best known.

Origins Woodlands and hedgerows in Europe and North America.

Season Spring flowering plants that are dormant during the summer and autumn. Most flower March through to June.

Hardiness Tough plants that are hardy throughout all of the UK.

Size Most reach a height of between 12cm and 20cm, and can often form clumps that are several metres wide.

Conditions Moist but well-drained, humus-rich soil; part shade. Some species will tolerate drier conditions during the dormant period.

*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society. †Hardiness ratings given where available.

▷ of spring, flowers, sets seed and dies back before the canopy of leaves completely blocks the light. The height of the plants varies with the growing conditions but most get to about 15cm tall, with the individual flowers about 2cm wide. The coloured part of the flower is made up of, usually, six sepals (the petals have been reduced to nectaries) in a simple rounded shape that Bowles described as having a 'Quakerish loveliness'. Flowering starts in early March and is finished by June, after which there is no sign of the plant until it comes out of dormancy the following spring.

Not all forms of *Anemone nemorosa* are as demure as the wild form; some are utterly mad. In *A. nemorosa* 'Virescens' the sepals and bracts have morphed into tiny green leaves that form a tousled mop. *A. nemorosa* 'Bracteata Pleniflora' has a ruff of green and white bracts and white sepals that are also splashed with green. The flowers are never quite the same from year to year or from plant to plant.

Anemone ranunculoides is a native of central Europe that has very bright buttercup-yellow flowers but with the similar delicate foliage of *A. nemorosa*. It establishes quickly and spreads more rapidly than its cousin. When the two are grown together they often hybridise, with *A. ranunculoides* bringing its yellow flowers to the union. One of the offspring is *Anemone x lipsiensis*, a compact plant with pale-yellow flowers.

The earliest of the anemones to flower is *Anemone blanda*. It is naturally variable but the flowers tend to be deep blue and, at up to 5cm across, much larger than those of *A. nemorosa* with narrow sepals. *A. blanda* comes from the eastern Mediterranean and will tolerate both chalky soils and a dry summer.

Anemonella thalictroides is a diminutive relative of meadow rue and, although from another genus, it has long been welcomed into the family of wood anemones. Slow to establish and to clump up, it is not as easy to please as the true anemones, preferring a slightly acid soil. If the soil is too wet, the tubers will rot, but in the perfect situation it will seed itself about, often producing variations from its normally white flowers.

All of these woodland plants can light up a shady garden in spring. Where shade is lacking, tuck them around later-flowering perennials. My favourite use is in rough short grass in a happy jumble with celandines, *Cyclamen hederifolium*, *Scilla bifolia* and a few clumps of hellebores. It is a sight that, as Mr Bowles would say, goes straight to the heart.

• John's recommendations for wood anemones continue over the next six pages.



***Anemone nemorosa* 'Cedric's Pink'**
Like many pink-flowered forms, the flowers open white then develop a pink tinge before finishing a purple-pink. It is also one of the earliest to flower. 15cm. RHS H7, USDA 5a-8b.



***Anemone nemorosa* 'Bill Baker's Pink'**
Pink-flowered forms are common in woodlands in central England, particularly Berkshire, where this one was found. The flowers have a lilac tinge when they open and fade to pink. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



***Anemone nemorosa* 'Lismore Blue'**
A floriferous cultivar from Ireland with a neat, compact habit and large, lavender-blue flowers. This was the preferred cultivar of the renowned plantsman Christopher Lloyd. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



***Anemonella thalictroides* f. *rosea* 'Oscar Schoaf'**
A delicate form with double, pink flowers, resembling a miniature pincushion. Found in a graveyard in Minnesota. Slow-growing so not often sold. 12cm. RHS H6, USDA 5a-8b.



Anemonella thalictroides* f. *rosea
Often produces pink flowers, this selection has been named because the flowers are much darker than most. The plant is slow to develop and in ideal conditions reaches about 10cm tall. RHS H5, USDA 4a-8b.



***Anemone nemorosa* 'Evelyn Meadows'**
The original plant was found in the Picos de Europa mountains in Spain by galanthophile Richard Nutt. The foliage has a dark-purple sheen and the reverse of the petals is deep pink. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



***Anemone nemorosa* 'Slack Top Pink'**
Found as a seedling a decade ago by plantsman Michael Mitchell, and named after his Yorkshire nursery. Michael selected it for its open flowers and neat habit. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



***Anemone nemorosa* 'Flushing'**
A vigorous cultivar that seems to spread more quickly than most others. The flower has a slightly nodding habit, which allows you to see the pink reverse of the flower. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



***Anemone nemorosa* 'Robinsoniana'**
A cultivar that has stood the test of time. It is one that EA Bowles wrote about and is named for the gardener William Robinson. The flowers are a pale, washed-out, lavender blue. 20cm. AGM*. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



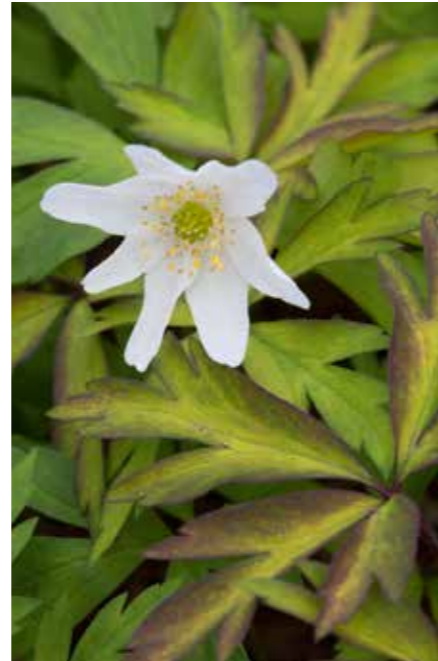
***Anemone nemorosa* 'Parlez Vous'**
Despite the awfulness of the First World War in France, plantsman Frank Waley was able to botanise and found this cultivar in France. It is one of the most vigorous of the family. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



Anemone nemorosa 'La Rochanne'
A recent introduction from the Netherlands with almost-black foliage, that shows off the brightness of the flowers. Despite the dark foliage it produces lots of flowers. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



Anemone nemorosa 'Salt and Pepper'
An unusual and rare cultivar, with a curious central boss of nectaries and stamens that have become petaloid, surrounded by white sepals edged in dark green, giving it a two-tone effect. 12cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



Anemone nemorosa 'Glyncock Gold'
This was found by Brian Dockerill, a champion of variegated plants, and named after his village in Wales. The new foliage has a rusty-red edge and matures to olive green. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



Anemone nemorosa 'Blue Eyes'
A beautiful but erratic plant, which in some years has a pronounced blue centre when the flower opens, in other years it is very faint. The blue always eventually fades to white. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



Anemonella thalictroides 'Snowflakes'
Introduced by Fernwood Nursery in Maine, USA, these elegant flowers look delicate but are tough enough to stand up to wind and rain during the blustery weather of April and May. 12cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



Anemone nemorosa 'Ploeger's Plena'
A vigorous cultivar that reputedly flowers much earlier than others, with mint-green and white bracts and white sepals. The same plant is also being sold as 'Ploeger de Bilt'. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



Anemone nemorosa 'Bracteata Pleniflora'
No wood anemone could be called flamboyant but this one gets close. As its name suggests, the flower is a combination of bracts, which form an eye-catching ruff, and sepals. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



Anemone nemorosa 'Vestal'
A beautiful and robust cultivar with flowers that have a central white cushion made up of stamens that have become petaloid, sitting on a corona of white petals. 15cm. AGM. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



Anemone nemorosa 'Stammerberg'
The name refers to the mountain in Austria where this cultivar was recently found. The sepals are finely cut, almost filigree, with a pale-pink sheen on the white background. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



Anemone nemorosa dark leaf form
Seedlings with dark foliage appear regularly in the wild and several nurseries sell forms with dark leaves. In general the flowers are simple, pure white, typical of the species. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.

Cultivation

- Although in the wild *Anemone nemorosa* grows in even the densest woodland shade, it flowers more profusely in clearings where light reaches the woodland floor or in places where the trees have been recently coppiced. Similarly in the garden, anemones will flower in the shade cast by buildings or fences but flower most abundantly when growing around deciduous shrubs or among later-flowering perennials.
- As important as shade is moisture and humus. None of the woodland anemones thrive in either dry soils or very rich soils, which tend to produce plants with lots of foliage and not many flowers. The ideal open and friable soil can be achieved by adding lots of leaf mould or composted bark to the soil when you plant your anemones. Thereafter, when the plants are dormant, mulch the area every few years with a thick layer of leaf mould. In some years the plants are affected by powdery mildew or leaf spot. This can blemish the foliage but neither are fatal so not worth getting agitated about.
- Nurseries sell *Anemone nemorosa* either as growing plants in small pots or as bare corms, which look like pieces of thin twig. I find that the plants that are pot grown establish more quickly and more reliably than the bare corms. *Anemone blanda* corms are much tougher and can be reliably bought as dried corms. Remember that anemones go dormant soon after they have finished flowering, so to avoid putting a fork or trowel through them when weeding it is a good idea to mark where they are.
- After a few years the plants make a mat of thin rhizomes, which should be divided every few years if you want to create a carpet of the plants. Regular division will also ensure that your plants flower well and that you will have a few to pass on to friends. Simply dig the plant up when it is dormant, carefully tease the rhizomes apart and then replant the pieces.

Where to plant

- Woodland anemones look impressive in the garden when they carry the baton on from snowdrops.

and can be planted to cover the soil under trees that later in the year would be too shaded for most plants. They are also perfect companions to magnolias and amelanchier, providing pools of flowers for the shrubs to float above.

• The conventional wisdom – and one that I have followed – says that woodland anemones will not thrive in pots but Brian Ellis, nurseryman at Avondale Nursery in Warwickshire where the National Collection of *Anemone nemorosa* is held, assures me that this is not true. He grows the entire collection in large (10L) pots using ordinary multipurpose compost. Each year he strips away the soil at the top and at the bottom of the pot and replaces it with fresh compost that has a slow-release fertiliser added. “You end up with a sort of Camembert effect,” he says, “with the twiggy mass of the plant sandwiched between layers of compost.” Keep the pots well watered and in the shade, especially during the summer.

Where to see and buy

- **Avondale Nursery***
Russell's Nursery, Mill Hill,
Baginton, Warwickshire CV8 3AG.
Tel 024 7667 3662,
avondalenursery.co.uk
 - **Ballyrobert Gardens**
154 Ballyrobert Road, Ballyclare,
Northern Ireland BT39 9RT.
Tel 028 9344 0101,
ballyrobertgardens.com
 - **Edrom Nurseries**
Coldingham, Eyemouth,
Berwickshire TD14 5TZ.
Tel 01890 771386,
edrom-nurseries.co.uk
 - **Kingston Lacy***
Wimborne, Dorset BH21 4EA.
Tel 01202 883402,
nationaltrust.org.uk/
kingston-lacy
 - **Long Acre Plants**
Southmarsh, nr Wincanton,
Somerset BA9 8EX.
Tel 01963 32802,
plantsforshade.co.uk
 - **Pottertons Nursery**
Cottage Nursery, Moortown
Road, Market Rasen,
Lincolnshire LN7 6HX.
Tel 01472 851714,
pottertons.co.uk
- *National Collection holders.



***Anemonella thalictroides* 'Green Hurricane'**
The curious green flowers nestle in the plant's foliage and are easy to miss. Narrow, white petals develop into the shape of a child's pinwheel. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 4a-8b.



***Anemone x lipsiensis* 'Vindobonensis'**
An old cultivar from the Vienna woods. It has creamy-yellow flowers that appear in mid-April and which continue to the end of June. The new foliage has a red sheen. 18-20cm. RHS H5.

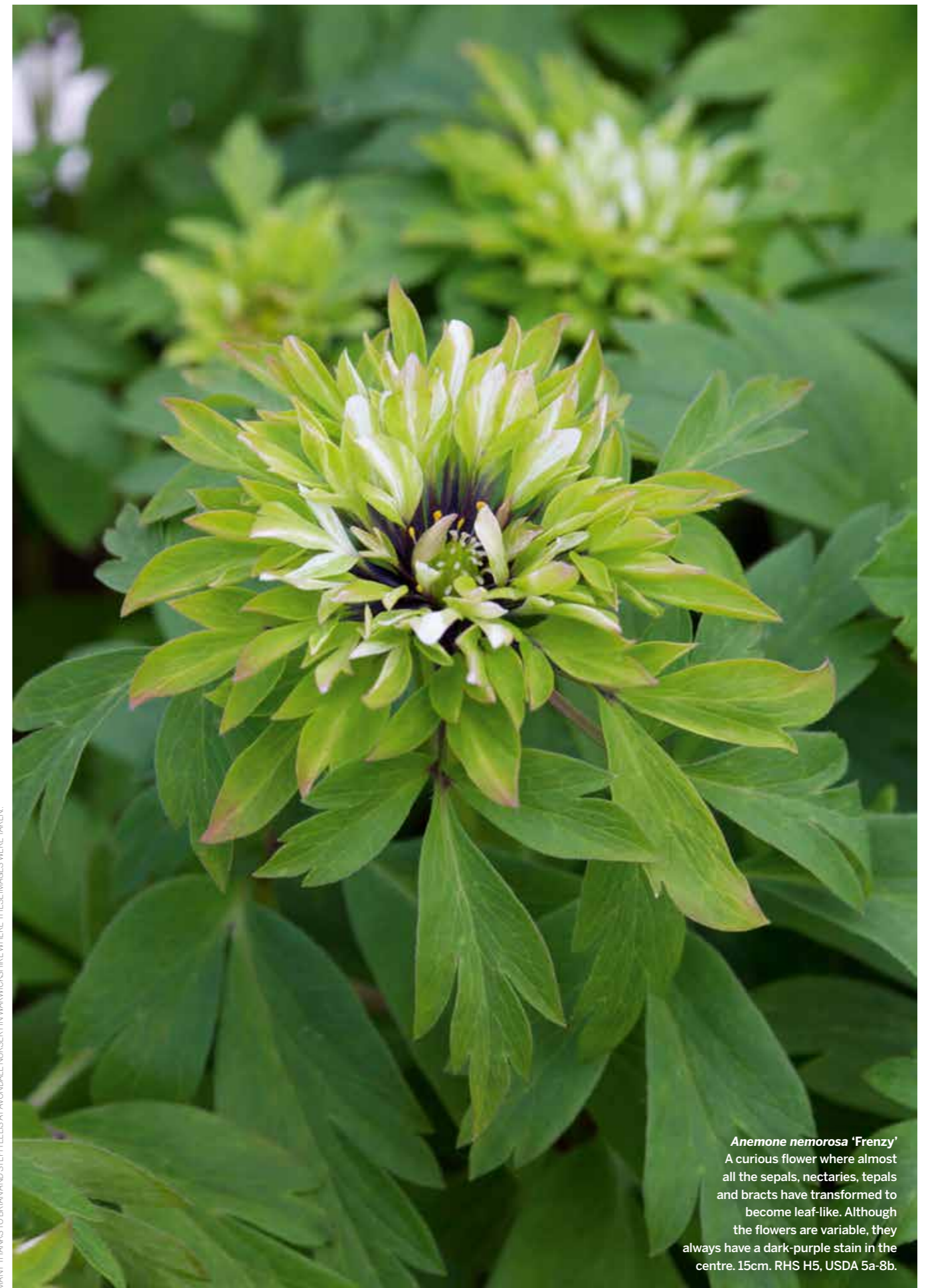


***Anemone ranunculoides* 'Frank Waley'**
Another plant from the collection of Frank Waley, made a century ago. He selected it for having much larger flowers than the species. It is also more vigorous. 20cm. RHS H5, USDA 4a-8b.



***Anemone ranunculoides* 'Laciniata'**
Attractive, deeply cut leaves and reddish stems that hold the large flowers above the foliage. The flowers are a lustrous yellow, reminiscent of buttercups. It flowers in April and May. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 4a-8b.

MANY THANKS TO BRIAN AND STEPHEN AT AVONDALE NURSERY IN WARWICKSHIRE WHERE THESE IMAGES WERE TAKEN.



***Anemone nemorosa* 'Frenzy'**
A curious flower where almost all the sepals, nectaries, tepals and bracts have transformed to become leaf-like. Although the flowers are variable, they always have a dark-purple stain in the centre. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.