

## **Iberis sempervirens (Candytuft)**

Botanical Bytes by Bruner

By Gregory Bruner

Foliage Height: 6-12"  
Foliage Width: 18-24"  
Flower Height: 6-12"  
Foliage Color: Green  
Flower Color: White or Purple  
USDA Hardiness: 4-9  
Moisture: Average  
Light: Full Sun – Part Sun



*Iberis sempervirens* is native to Southern Europe and Western Asia. The name *Iberis* is associated with Iberia, a region of Spain. Many of the members of the *Iberis* Genus are native to the Iberian Peninsula. Because “*sempervirens*” means “always green,” when taken as a whole, *Iberis sempervirens* is a wonderful evergreen ground cover native to the Iberian Peninsula of Spain.

Evergreen Candytuft enjoys well-drained slightly alkaline soils in sunny locations. This allows it to grow and thrive in most average garden conditions. If soils are poorly drained or are composed of heavy clay, consider planting it in a raised bed where the growing conditions are more favorable. This particular plant is very unforgiving of areas that stay wet during the winter months.

The stems are brittle and easily broken. When cultivating and cleaning around them, be very careful. The spring flush of flowers should last a few weeks. After these blooms have faded, it is useful to give the plants a light trim, removing the flowers plus an inch or so of stem. This will force more branching and help maintain nice compact plants.

In colder climates the foliage may be susceptible to winter burn or sun bleaching. To avoid this, cover plants in late December with pine boughs (possibly from a recently used Christmas tree) or Pinestraw and then remove the covering material early in the spring.

*Iberis sempervirens* is a larval plant for the Southern Small White butterfly (*Pieris manni*), which is native to Southern Europe. This petite fluttering beauty will lay only one egg per leaf. This reminds us that each of our flowering family members is part of a much larger ecosystem. Spring butterflies will visit *Iberis*, but it is resistant to deer and rabbits if these large and small critters visit your garden regularly.

Candytuft has been part of the garden scene for over a century. It has been referenced in popular literature as far back as 1818. In 1918 the U.S. Dispensatory stated that the leaves, stems, and roots possess medicinal properties, but the seeds are most potent. Various reports claim many possible uses, including treatment of rheumatism, asthma, bronchitis, and some digestive issues.

*Iberis* is a wonderful addition to a garden in need of early spring color. It has a long history with gardeners and has earned its good reputation by being a survivor and giving us the flowering show we desire year after year.