

Phlox subulata (Creeping Phlox)

Botanical Bytes by Bruner

By Gregory Bruner

Foliage Height: 3-6”
Foliage Width: 18-24”
Flower Height: 3-6”
Foliage Color: Green
Flower Color: Pink, White, Purple,
Lavender
USDA Hardiness: 3-9
Moisture: Dry to Medium
Light: Full Sun – Part Sun



Phlox subulata is native to the eastern and central United States. It enjoys well-drained sandy or rocky soils from Maine west to Michigan, south to Tennessee, and east to North Carolina.

Average gardens with well-drained humus-rich soils and full sun will allow this plant to thrive. Less than perfect conditions such as rocky or sandy soils in hot and dry exposures will not deter this hardy garden ground cover as long as it is watered during the first summer. If you have a sunny spot in a flower bed, this flowering gem should do fine. Just avoid hard compacted soils.

Creeping Phlox is one of the earliest bloomers in the garden. Depending on the region of the country, usually it will bloom between March and May. The masses of flowers literally cover the plant so that you cannot see the leaves. Colors naturally occurring are pink, purple, white, and lavender, but plant breeders have created all shades in between as well as bi-colored varieties.

Few problems generally arise with Phlox subulata in the garden. Deer typically don't bother it, but rabbits occasionally will trim it. On warm spring days butterflies will visit it.

The most common uses of this incredible evergreen phlox are as a ground cover or for erosion control. It is also resistant to drought, air pollution, and deer. Its spreading habit makes it perfect for rock gardens, where its flowers can spill over the rocks.

This wonderful plant was originally brought into cultivation in the early 1700s and eventually became a favorite because of its dramatic spring display and toughness. After seeing Phlox subulata in one of the pine barrens of New Jersey in 1831, British plant collector Thomas Drummond was quoted as saying “The beauty of that alone is worth coming to America to see.”

This sturdy little ground cover was labeled “The Gas Station Plant” because of its ability to survive harsh conditions. Gas station attendants are not known for their green thumbs and love of landscaping, yet this plant has thrived at their stations. It is also able to withstand snow, wind, hail, and other nasty weather that can be thrown at it.

Phlox subulata is a unique blend of beauty and brawn. Gardeners of all experience levels with a sunny spot in their yards can enjoy wonderful explosions of spring color.