CATEGORY: WILDLIFE ATTRACTOR, EDIBLE



Potting Bench
FALL SERIES

Welcome to this month's installment of "The Potting Bench"! If you are considering next years' candidates for planting now, we're taking a look at a tough-as-nails addition to your landscape that shrugs off our fiercest summer sun, blooms continuously, and doubles as a tasty herb for your kitchen! Look no further than *Society Garlic*, *Tulbaghia violacea*. (I must admit, I'm obsessed with saying *'tul-BAG-ee-uh vy-oh-LAY-see-uh'*!)



Named by Carl Linnaeus in the 1771, this resilient plant is native to South Africa. It belongs to the amaryllis family (Amaryllidaceae), making it a close relative of agapanthus, daffodils, and culinary favorites like onions and chives.

Sourcing Your Society Garlic

What to Look For - *Society Garlic* grows in neat, individual clumps of narrow, grass-like leaves that reach about 1 to 2 feet tall and wide. One Magnolia Master Gardener describes its foliage as resembling a "skinny liriope," topped with delicate blue-purple or pink star-like flowers that bloom on tall stems all summer long.

Top Cultivars - While the classic green form is beautiful, there are several striking cultivars available in the trade:

- *'Silver Lace'* and *'Variegata'*: These varieties produce eye-catching, cream-striped variegated foliage reminiscent of Aztec grass.
- *'Tricolor'*: A stunning selection featuring unique blue-grey foliage (with new leaves showing a slight pink tinge) and soft pinkish-lilac flowers.

Transplanting and Placement

Climate & Hardiness - *Society Garlic* is reliably hardy in USDA Hardiness Zones 7 through 10, which perfectly covers Magnolia Point. Because it originates from high-elevation subtropical grasslands in South Africa, it carries excellent cold-tolerant traits that help it survive our occasional winter frosts.

The Perfect Spot - To maximize blooms, site your plants in full sun. This plant is a champ in high heat;

Continued

Potting Bench

Happy gardening, and enjoy the beautiful lavender blooms and fresh kitchen harvests of this ndestructible Southern classic!



local gardeners have noted Society Garlic "living its best life" in baking-hot downtown street planters even as car air conditioners struggle to keep up! Its compact size also makes it highly versatile for tight spaces, low border edgings, or tiered garden beds. Perfect along walkways, driveways, or garden bed borders.

Soil and Drainage - Ensure the planting site has excellent drainage and is enriched with high organic matter. While the rhizomes are incredibly drought-tolerant once established, they appreciate consistent irrigation to look their best. Avoid soggy, waterlogged soil, which can lead to root rot.



When & How - While you can plant up until the end of November in our neighborhood, April through June is ideal. Here's the *'Potting Bench Universal Container Planting Guide*', good for container transplants of all similarly packaged nursery plants:

Dig a planting hole slightly wider than the nursery pot and equal in depth.

Gently slide the plant out of its container and tease any tightly bound exterior roots. Position the root ball level with or slightly above the surrounding soil grade to prevent crown rot.

Backfill with organic-amended native soil and press around the base to eliminate air pockets.

Water deeply right after planting. Maintain regular irrigation while the root system establishes, after which the plants become noticeably drought-tolerant.

Ongoing Maintenance & Culinary Use

- **Potting Up -** Perhaps the absolute best use for *Society Garlic* is in sunny patio container gardens. If growing in pots, lift and divide the clumps every few years in the spring to keep them from becoming too pot-bound.

- **Deterring Wildlife -** While pollinators will visit the star-shaped blooms, the plant's distinct garlic aroma is a natural deterrent that will discourange hungry deer.

- **Harvesting for the Kitchen -** *Society Garlic* is fully edible. In fact, it earned its unique name because it delivers a wonderful garlic-like flavor to dishes without leaving you with the lingering bad breath associated with true garlic, making it perfectly safe to consume before social gatherings! Simply snip the fresh leaves, chop them up, and use them exactly like chives to garnish salads, soups, or summer marinades.

- STORY, PHOTOS: EDITOR