

How To Grow Achimenes Plant – Light, Soil, Bulbs, Rhizomes and Flowers

Summary: *The Achimenes plant is related to the African Violet, grows from bulbs or rhizomes and provides flowers for a long period of time. Learn about the growing and care of this charming under known gem – the Achimenes plant.*

The modern hybrid Achimenes bear little resemblance to the species originally transferred from tropical America to English and European gardens early in the Nineteenth Century. These original importations soon became very popular and before 1910 many new hybrids had been developed. In the last 75 or 100 years, however, most of these varieties have been lost to commerce, now only a limited number of types are commonly grown. Many fine hybrids have been developed in the past. Their [care is similar to African Violets](#).

As popular flowers the Achimenes at one time competed with Gloxinias and [Begonias](#) as florist flowers, because of their ability to withstand better the usual house and window garden conditions of heat and humidity. For unheated greenhouse, window garden, or outside under a tree or lath shelter few plants can compete with Achimenes for beauty and length of bloom. It is almost impossible to praise them too highly.

Achimenes Excellent Ornamental Plants

Like most plants of the Gesneria family, these are excellent ornamental plants for their foliage alone even if they had no flowers, but to once see the choice colors in the blooms and to realize the ease of their culture is to immediately become an Achimenes enthusiast.

The plants grow from small tubers, bulbs or rhizomes which vary greatly in shape and size among the varieties, but usually resemble small pine cones. A very interesting problem is to procure a number of mixed tubers, sort them out by variety through their individual tuber form, then to check your determinations when the plants come into bloom. Since the foliage varies almost as much as the tuber form and the flowers, you can begin to check your guesses as soon as the plants begin to grow from their various leaf shape, coloring, and texture.



Planting Achimenes

Plant the tubers in a good porous soil – an African Violet mix is ideal. Water sparingly until up, then top dress with a light application of fertilizer. To attain specimen plants, do not spare the tubers when planting. Put a dozen or more in a 6 inch pot or hanging basket. Good results can be obtained with fewer bulbs in a pot by pinching out the center growth when about 4 or 5 inches high, but it takes somewhat longer for the pot to reach specimen form.

Keep the plants moist after growth has begun. A night temperature of 65 to 75 degrees F. hastens growth and blooming, however, we start and carry ours along in an unheated greenhouse which in our area means a night temperature of 50 to 60 degrees during most of the spring and summer. This retards blooming somewhat over the use of heat, but we feel gives a more robust growth and better color and lasting qualities in the blooms.

Light Requirements For Achimenes

The plants should be grown in the most light they can tolerate without burning the leaves or causing the blooms to wither. If the plants fail to bloom in one situation, move them into more light, if they still fail to bloom, move again and give the pot a sprinkling of superphosphate.

Occasional light applications of liquid fertilizer, bone-meal, or well rotted manure (only when outdoors) should be given to keep the plants growing and blooming satisfactorily.

Achimenes treated in this manner should bloom for many months, from June to late October or November depending on the locality and conditions under which grown. Here in our area of Central California near the coast the summers are cool, consequently our plants usually start blooming in late June and continue in fine shape until frost in late November or early December. In sections of the South plants should bloom from May until November outside, and even later if taken indoors.

Storing The Bulbs or Rhizomes

At the approach of frost, do not water the plants to dry them off and force dormancy in the same manner as for [Gladiolus](#) or [tuberous Begonias](#). When the leaves are dry, cut the stems just above the soil and store the pots or tubers in the soil in a dry place above freezing; such as, in the garage, basement or attic. If placed under a greenhouse bench, turn the pots on their sides to protect them from much moisture. If the dormant season is very long in your section, it might be advisable to sprinkle the soil in the pots once or twice during the winter to prevent the tubers from getting too dry.

By far the best results will be obtained if the tubers are not disturbed but allowed to remain in the pots until early spring when they may be taken out and repotted. However, for an especially fine display, leave the tubers in the same pot and soil two or even three season, merely top dressing the soil with fresh soil and bonemeal when the plants come up each spring.

If for any reason the tubers must be held for extended periods out of the potting soil, cover them with sand, sawdust, or preferably vermiculite which has proved to be the best material of all for holding bulbs and tubers.

Achimenes – Considerable Variation In Species

Preference for any flower, as with other items, is determined by so many personal factors that about all we can do is state more or less our own preferences in each group.

The Achimenes group is a relatively large one having somewhere over 40 wild species. This means that there is considerable variation in the species. However, unlike the Gladiolus, Iris, Dahlia, and many other garden flowers developed by intensive hybridization, the Achimenes varieties show a great variation in flower and plant form. For instance there are some with flowers like Gloxinias, other with flowers as flat as pansies. Others are intermediate between these with all types and shapes of tubes, and expanded portions of the tube. In addition, the leaves vary from small plain ones to large roundish or heart shaped leaves 5 inches or more across. The leaves are often beautifully veined or painted with brown or purple. The plant form varies from tall growing to more or less trailing types.

In order to accurately describe any variety, all these items as well as the size and shape of the tuber which was mentioned above must be noted. This is not often possible because of the space required for such a description.

Of the Achimenes species we have grown, *Achimenes longiflora* is perhaps the most interesting and unusual. It is very fine with large velvety-green leaves, long tubular pure white flowers with a delicious fragrance borne on stems 1-1/2 to 2-1/2 feet high. This one is fine for cutting. Unlike the others this species grows from tubers like smallish potatoes.

New varieties are being developed, and others previously lost to cultivation are being reintroduced. Hybridization of Achimenes was carried on very extensively at one time, however, we have had no luck with getting the hybrids to set seed even with hand pollination. We have found that the pollen ripens and soon falls from the anther so that the usual Achimenes flower fully mature will seem to be sterile of pollen. Last season we made hundreds of hand pollination crosses among the varieties we grow, but did not get even one pod of seed to develop. This year we are using the species as well as the hybrid varieties and hope to have better success.

by Richard Kent