



Meadow Saffron

Colchicum autumnale

Lily Family (Liliaceae Family)

Zones: 4-8

Full Sun

Moderate Water

Location: Seasonally throughout Garden

This autumn blooming corm is very similar in appearance to the Crocus, but genetically very different. This flower blooms in autumn to early winter. The flowers are goblet shaped and ranges in color from pink to purple to lilac. The foliage, which is dark green and grows to approximately 1-2.5 inches, will not emerge until late spring. At this time, photosynthesis takes place and feeds the bulb so it can bloom in the fall. The stem is virtually absent and the flowers grow directly from the bulb.

These plants are very toxic, containing high levels of the alkaloid colchicine. The seeds are the most toxic, but all parts are considered dangerous if ingested. This plant should not be confused with *Crocus sativus* (Saffron crocus), as no part of the plant is edible.

Its natural distribution is throughout Italy, North Africa and the Caucasus. The fruiting occurs between May and June. The seeds are fairly sticky and when birds are foraging in the area, they will stick to their feet and are spread to wherever they land and the seeds fall off.

The flowers are top-heavy and easily flop. A good way to prevent this is to plant them with a ground cover that can help prop them up and give them support but not inhibit the growth. These corms should be planted in an area with full to part sun and well-drained soil.