



CARE SHEET FOR GALANTHUS

Snowdrops, the common name for Galanthus, are a very welcome antidote to the winter doldrums, and we are fortunate to have swaths of them in the garden.

Ed planted a few, many years ago, and slowly over time they have been repeatedly divided. With each division the bulbs multiplied, so now, we have thousands of them.

If you look online, you'll notice many cultivars/selections/species for sale, in England. There is one supplier in the US (that we know of) who carries a wide selection, but be prepared to pay thru the nose. A while ago we purchased snowdrops, in England. While some of the selections have proven to be truly charming and worth their price, others tend to excite only 'Galanthophiles'; the truly subtle variations tend to be lost on a majority of gardeners, let alone the public...

For most of us, we'll purchase dormant bulbs in the autumn. This is not ideal, as Galanthus are somewhat finicky. It isn't that they won't emerge, come spring, but don't be surprised if you don't get 100% viability. Snowdrops do best when sold 'in the green' which means they have been freshly dug/divided. The small bulbs don't have a huge reservoir of energy to tap into and only grow one set of fragile roots a year, starting in August, hence its somewhat miffy reputation. More nurseries are now selling this bulb in flower so you know what you are paying for.

In the garden snowdrops do best in a partially shaded situation. If you have a very sandy, free-draining soil, amend it with compost. They love damp ground especially in the winter/spring. After the plant has finished flowering, allow the foliage to fully die down on its own. Do NOT cut the foliage off early, nor twist or braid it. Yes it will be ugly, but if planted around later emerging perennials, it won't be so offensive.

The Narcissus fly is the bane of snowdrops. After flowering, the fly will lay eggs on the foliage. The eggs hatch and the maggots will eat their way down into the bulb, destroying it. We've found that siting this bulb, where it gets afternoon or full shade after flowering, greatly reduces the chances of infestation. There is little in the way of chemical control, and what there is, is nasty.

To bulk up galanthus, liquid feed after flowering, with a half strength solution of a water-soluble fertilizer, every two weeks, until the foliage has died down completely. If you notice that the clumps are becoming congested (bulbs are starting to push up out of the ground), divide immediately after flowering. Do not let them dry out, as this will harm the roots. While this won't kill the plant, it won't like it much either. Feed them lightly, often!

A clump of fifteen bulbs can be split up into five clumps, and with liquid feeding you'll have a nice display in two years (from three bulbs per clump to eight or nine).