



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Ornamental Oreganos (Lifestyle Magazine August 2021)

By Dorothy Downing, UCCE Master Gardener

Thumbing through plant catalogues, I saw a plant so drop dead gorgeous I had to have it. It had little green bracts with tiny purple blossoms and heart-shaped leaves. I put *Origanum Rotundifolium* "Kent Beauty" on my list of plants to add to my garden.

I did a little research to make sure that this plant would fit into my mostly drought tolerant bed. Ornamental oreganos are native to hot Mediterranean hillsides and love full sun and a dry, well drained spot. The Greeks called this ancient herb *oros ganos*, meaning "joy of the mountain," and legend has it that Aphrodite created the sweet, spicy scent of its leaves as a symbol of happiness. Properly sited and then left alone, it will put on a display for months in the garden and even longer when cut for the vase.

I planted my ornamental oregano in a bed near the front of my house. This location gives the plant full sun in the afternoon and also allows a close-up view as we walk from the driveway to the front door. The plant itself only grows 4 to 6 inches high, so it needs a close view. The blooming stems, however, can reach 18 inches high.

While most oregano varieties are grown for their culinary use, ornamental oregano varieties are not, and in fact, have no taste at all. Ornamental oreganos are best used for their beauty in gardens, borders, and especially containers.

The flowers dry well for use in dried flower arrangement. To harvest the flowers, bunch the stems together and hang in a cool and airy place to dry. Once dry, strip the leaves from the stem and store in an airtight container. For fresh use, snip leaves or small sections of the plant after it has reached six inches in height. Keeping oregano clipped in this way will help the plant to bush out and encourage more foliage growth.

The spectacular flowers are composed of pale pink and chartreuse bracts which look like petticoat ruffles and the tiny purple flowers that peek out between the bracts. One of the unique features of Kent Beauty Oregano, besides its stunning flowers, is the prominent veins found in the heart-shaped blue green leaves.

Other varieties of ornamental oreganos are:

- "Amethyst Falls" has cascades of bright pink flowers peeking out from chartreuse bracts.
- "Cascading Ornamental Oregano," with tall stems of cascading sprays of pink bracts and flowers.
- "Kirigami" has small, rounded, light green aromatic leaves with purple-green highlights.
- "Rotkugel" has a profusion of flower heads filled with small bright pink flowers.
- "Pilgrim" boasts long clusters of tiny pink flowers, each surrounded by purple bracts on a background of blue-green leaves.



- "Drops of Jupiter" is a more upright variety of ornamental oregano, with chartreuse yellow leaves topped with mauve pink flowers. The leaves are edible, with less intense flavor than the herbal oregano varieties.

Ornamental Oreganos are particularly showy in hanging pots. They can also be used on the edges in raised beds or earthen embankments where they can hang over the edge. They do not take foot traffic well, so don't plant it between stepping stones. Rosemary, other oreganos and sedums make good companion plants.

They prefer winters on the dry side, as we usually have here, and they like to dry out between waterings. Once established, they are very drought-tolerant.

While deer and rabbits avoid them, bees love all oreganos, and those with flower bracts are favored by bumblebees. They don't seem to be bothered by slugs or snails or many diseases. They tolerate alkaline soil well.

Ornamental oreganos will bloom in the summer when many plants are taking a little break, and produce weeks of beauty to a sunny garden spot, with little care or watering once established.

Happy Gardening!

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