

Rising Star

Digitalis purpurea 'Camelot' series

By
Jimmy Turner
Director of Horticulture Research
Dallas Arboretum



At a glance

Latin Name: *Digitalis purpurea*

'Camelot' series

Common Name: Foxglove

Plant Type: Fall or spring planted cool season annual

Flowers: 4 colors; Cream, Lavender, White, Rose, and a mix.

Foliage: Large coarse textured mounds

Mature height: Foliage 18", but flower spikes will reach 4 ft.

Hardiness: winter annual in zones 7-9, not summer hardy.

Soil: well drained

Exposure: full sun to light shade

Water usage: medium

Sources: Local nurseries or seed.

Take a deep breath and repeat after me. This is an ANNUAL, only an ANNUAL! I don't care what you read on the label, in garden books, or whatever else you might have heard if your address has Texas in it, then it's an annual!

Even used as an annual *Digitalis* 'Camelot' fills a niche in my garden at a time of the year when my plant choices are very limited. Few spring flowers have the vertical spike flowers that foxglove does. I use these upright pastel flowers to fill the gaps in my early spring perennial borders and annual beds. During winter, the foliage also gives some interest to my otherwise brown beds. Foxglove is a natural companion to annual and spring bulb combinations, the tall spikes creating a wonderful backdrop for the early flowers. Unlike most cool season annuals, *D.* 'Camelot' doesn't mind light shade which makes it indispensable in mature gardens. I also use *Digitalis* 'Camelot' as I would ornamental kale in winter containers. The foliage gives height and texture and come spring you have 4 ft. tall spikes of flowers to wow your neighbors. The sturdy stems also make excellent cut flowers.



Historically about the only foxglove variety commercially available in our area was 'Foxy'. I prefer 'Camelot' due to its increased vigor and flower power. It also produces multiple spikes of flowers from secondary shoots, which extends the bloom time. 'Camelot' also has flowers that circle all the way around the flower stem, not just on one side. Available in the classic foxglove colors of cream, lavender, white, rose, and a mix. Flower spikes will begin to appear in mid-April and continue flowering until late May, about 6 weeks. I recommend cutting spent flowers off to extend the bloom time.

You may plant Digitalis 'Camelot' in the fall or early spring, but personally I prefer

planting smaller 4" or 5" pots in early fall. When planted in fall, along with pansies and ornamental kale, 'Camelot' will quickly form 1-½ ft. tall and wide mounds of coarse green foliage. Also, this extra growing time in the garden will reward your patience with 5 times the number of flowers of those planted in spring. If you do wait until spring, I recommend using larger 1 gallon plant material, since they will not have time to bulk up before flowering. Digitalis 'Camelot' is quite easy to grow in the garden. Plant them in full sun or light shade with well-drained soil, and add some granular fertilizer when first planting. Since these are a cool season only plant the water requirements are quite low. During severe freezes the foliage may die back to the ground, but don't despair it will quickly resprout to fill back in. Soon as plants go out of bloom in late-May pull them out or cut them off at the ground, otherwise the foliage will just linger until killed by the high heat of our summers.

When most Texas gardeners hear the word "Foxglove" they think of cool, green English perennial borders with filled with 100's of plants we can't grow in Texas, but thanks to our long mild winters we can actually grow this one as an annual. I challenge you to expand your palette of cool season annuals this year and try some Digitalis 'Camelot'. Think of using them like you would dianthus, snapdragons or Iceland poppies. Just remember the sooner you plant them the bigger they will be, and I guarantee your neighbors will be envious!



About the author: Jimmy Turner is the Director of Horticulture Research at the Dallas Arboretum, visit www.dallasplanttrials.org for more information on his trials.