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SWEET ANNIE (*Artemisia annua)*

Sweet, sweet Sweet Annie…unless you happen to be allergic to ragweed pollen, in which case you might not think it's so sweet. This is a highly scented, tall annual herb in the Artemisia family. *Artemissia annua* is the scientific name, and among its common names are Sweet Wormwood, Sweet Sagewort, Ambrosia and Chinese Fragrant Fern. Two Chinese names also show up in the literature—*Qinghao* and *Huang Hua Hao.*

Originating in Europe and Asia, the plant has been widely used in gardens, where it was valued for its scent and for its foliage. Because it self-sows so readily, it is now a common weed worldwide. If you want Sweet Annie in the garden without all its progeny the following year, it can be deadheaded or just down before it flowers—possibly an uphill battle and one you may or may not wish to wage.

Sweet Annie can reach as high as six feet, or be diminutive if under difficult conditions, such as being mowed with the lawn. The leaves are soft, finely divided and bluish green, rather than the silvery gray-green of other Artemisias. Flowers are an inconspicuous yellow. It prefers full sun or partial shade, average soil and regular water—no special care, really. Its status as a "weed" will tell you it will grow in many situations, including containers, where it will be tall but not grow to its full potential. Aphids might be a concern, although I haven't seen them on my plants…yet.

One source says that deer are repelled by Sweet Annie and that one can plant a hedge of the herb for that purpose. I will definitely be trying that next year! Little plants readily transplant so they can be moved from wherever they happen to pop up to wherever you would rather have them.

A favorite way to use Sweet Annie, aside from the back of the border, is in wreaths. The heavier stems can be wired together to make the wreath or cut stems can be added to another wreath base, such as straw or grapevine. It can also be used as a light filler in floral arrangements, either dried or fresh. Another use would be in sachets, along with rosemary and lavender or other herbs of your choice. My references say to hang it to dry, but I also have it drying upright in a vase, which results in some curving at the tips, but good shape in general. Color retention of both foliage and flowers seems to be very good.

Artemisia annua has been used in Chinese folk medicine for fevers, intestinal parasites, infectious diarrhea and hemorrhoids, although there are no scientific studies to indicate its effectiveness. One method of using the herb is as a tea, but it is un-certain how effective this is. However, an anti-malarial called "artemisinin" was first extracted in 1972 and administered to Chinese soldiers in Vietnam. More recently, the plant has shown pro-mise in fighting certain cancers, namely leukemia, breast and prostate cancers.

Is Sweet Annie a useful plant for a tall border, an aromatic drying herb for crafting and flower arranging, a repellant between valued plants and Bambi…or an invasive weed that triggers allergic reactions? As with most plants, it all depends on the gardener's individual needs and wishes. You get to choose. As for me, I'll keep it.

Thanks to Sue Cutter for this report on Sweet Annie.