

# SUPER COOL PLANTS

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## Oppressive heat is no problem for this drought-tolerant native

While traveling in England in July a few years ago—which happened to be during a scorching heat wave—I kept noticing one plant; it stood out proudly despite the steamy conditions. While most of its neighbors had wilting flowers and drooping foliage thanks to the parched soil, this plant was a 3-foot-tall beauty. Later I discovered that it was Mardi Gras® sneezeweed, a beacon of resilience amid adversity. With its fiery blossom hues of red, orange, and yellow, it seemed to shine happily, unfazed by the record-breaking temperatures. Its exceptional qualities were obviously no secret to the gardeners of the UK, because I saw it in almost every landscape I visited.

This perennial's ability to thrive with little irrigation highlights its adaptability and makes it a valuable asset in gardens with unpredictable weather patterns. And its vibrant colors were seemingly untouched by the merciless

sun. Like many *Helenium* varieties, Mardi Gras® thrives in full sun but does fine with some partial shade. It prefers well-drained soil but is adaptable to various soil types, including clay and loam. While it can tolerate drought conditions, regular watering during dry spells will help maintain optimal growth and flowering. There are many varieties of sneezeweed in a multitude of colors and growth heights, but Mardi Gras® is the perfect mix of showy and well behaved.

You can expect this sneezeweed to bloom from midsummer through late fall. Because a single stem can sport dozens of daisy-like blossoms, it's an excellent candidate for cut flowers. The bright blooms are highly attractive to pollinators too, and the seedheads that are left behind are a favorite snack of birds. However, the biggest bonus of Mardi Gras® is its deer and rabbit resistance. If your soil is on the moister side, your plant may reach upwards of 4 feet tall. In that case, you might need to stake it to prevent flopping. To help support the plant, I use a dark-colored tomato cage that is hidden by the foliage. This is an easy-to-share perennial; simply slice off chunks of the root mass with a shovel in spring.

The genus name *Helenium* refers to Greek mythology's Helen of Troy, whose beauty was the cause of the Trojan War—"the face that launched a thousand ships," as the saying goes. In my garden, Mardi Gras® brings a thousand smiles throughout its growing season.

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### | SOURCES |

- **American Meadows**, Shelburne, VT; 802-227-7200; americanmeadows.com
- **Almost Eden**, Merryville, LA; 337-375-2114; almostedenplants.com



### Mardi Gras® sneezeweed *Helenium* 'Helbro'

**ZONES:** 4–8

**CONDITIONS:** Full sun to partial shade; well-drained soil

**NATIVE RANGE:** North and Central America