

Cultural Details: **Aster (Bedding)**

Asters have been popular Summer bedding plants for many years. They give a good late-flowering performance when other bedding plants have gone past their best. They are generally sold as green plants with a colour label.

They are straightforward to raise, but require good glasshouse hygiene to avoid damping off and root diseases at all stages.

Variety Selection

Moles Seeds lists several compact bedding asters, from the small flowered Pinocchio mixture for edging, to the larger flowered types such as Colour Carpet and Milady (the most popular choices for bedding production programmes). Milady is available in separate colours for formal bedding schemes.

Programming the Crop

Sow from early February to March for sales from late April to June.

Propagation and Growing-on

Sow onto the surface of a free-draining, open, seed sowing compost, which should be thoroughly wetted with a suitable fungicide prior to sowing (to prevent damping-off diseases), and the trays allowed to drain. Sow into plug trays to prevent root disturbance or into seed trays. Cover the seed with a thin layer of vermiculite, and cover trays with clear or milky polythene to maintain humidity, until the first seedlings are visible. Germination takes around 7-10 days at 18-21°C. Keep the germinating seedlings moist at all times.

After around 5 weeks the young plants are ready for transfer into 6- or 9-packs, filled with a standard potting compost. Grow on at around 15°C until they are nicely established, then the temperature can be dropped to around 10°C. They can be sold as soon as there is good leaf coverage in the pack.

Pest and Disease

Maintain good air movement through the crop, and water in the morning rather than the evening to keep the foliage dry and lessen attack by Botrytis. Pay good attention to glasshouse hygiene, using only fresh trays, pots, compost, water and clean bench tops to avoid damping-off diseases. Grow Asters on the dry side to lessen possibility of losses due to root diseases. Monitor for the presence of Aphids and Whitefly and spray accordingly, according to the chemical manufacturer's guidelines.

Information provided for guidance only, as cultural practices and climatic circumstances vary.