

Cultural Details: **Aster (Cut Flower)**

Asters are traditionally popular cut flowers, for the mid-to late Summer flowering period. Asters thrive in a sunny aspect with well-drained soil, with ideally some protection from the wind. We offer a selection of varieties, with a wide range of flower types.

There are three methods of growing asters (*Callistephus*) as a cut flower crop:

1. Sowing seed under glass and transplanting into open ground
2. Direct sowing in open ground
3. Whole production under glass

1. Sowing seed under glass and transplanting into open ground
Sow during February/April into seed trays, blocks or module cell trays at around 15-18°C; cover seed. Seed count is approx. 400 per gram. Germination should be visible after around 7-10 days.

Transplant into borders from mid-~May onwards, at around 25x25cm spacing. The crop will flower slightly earlier if planted into an unheated poly tunnel, otherwise sowing to flowering, for a variety like Matsumoto (probably the finest cut flower variety we offer) will take around 100 days. It is helpful to provide netting support for the flower stems, to prevent collapse.

2. Direct sowing into open ground
Sow seeds thinly into rows 25cm apart during April. Once the seedlings are sufficiently large, thin to the required spacing. The disadvantage of this method over transplanting is that weed control around the developing seedlings is more difficult than transplanting at regular spacing.

3. Whole production under glass
This method will provide a flower crop later than that grown outside, i.e. late September to October. Sowing is carried out in June, and the young plants are planted out into suitably prepared soil in glasshouse beds.

Pest and Disease

Callistephus or Aster Wilt (*Fusarium oxysporum callistephi*) is the greatest threat to aster production. Plants wilt, usually just before flowering, and a pinkish area will be visible on the blackened stem bases. Chemical control may be possible, otherwise make sure that resistant varieties are used, and rotate the crop (7 year rotation is recommended) to prevent build up of the disease in the soil.

Otherwise the crop can be affected by caterpillars (damage will be obvious) and by aphids, which may spread viruses such as Cucumber Mosaic Virus (yellow mottling of leaves) and Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus (distortion of growing tissues).

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