

Cultural Details: **Gloxinia**

Gloxinia is a traditional pot plant for sowing December-February for Summer sales. The Empress F1 hybrid mixture produces spectacular trumpet-shaped flowers in a range of colours including bicoloured and spotted types. They are perhaps more suited to grower-retailers as the foliage can be easily damaged during transport.

Gloxinias require care to produce satisfactory results.

Propagation and Growing-on

Sow the very small seed (25,000 per gram) onto a free-draining, low nutrient compost, which should be thoroughly wetted with a suitable fungicide prior to sowing (to prevent damping-off diseases), and the trays allowed to drain. Cover trays with clear or milky polythene to maintain humidity, until the first seedlings are visible, but do not exclude light, which is essential for germination. Germination takes 21 days at 20-25°C. Keep the germinating seedlings moist at all times.

Use of supplementary lights at 5-7,000 lux will enhance development of the young plants if early-sown, as ambient light levels in February and March can be quite low. Maintain temperatures of 18-22°C.

After around 6 weeks the young plants are ready for transfer into large-celled plug trays. Use a low nutrient, free-draining compost, as Gloxinia is sensitive to high salts.

Grow them on at around 18°C, taking care not to over-water. Once the plants have filled the cell, pot up into 12cm half-pots (Gloxinia is shallow-rooted), using a low-nutrient compost as before. Addition of perlite or coarse grit to the medium will aid drainage and maintain an open structure. Shade the plants and grow on at around 18°C. High humidity should be maintained e.g. by damping down the glasshouse floor. Do not water onto the foliage as it may mark the leaves. A weak feed solution can be applied once the plants start to bud up.

Pest and Disease

Monitor the crop for signs of Whitefly, Aphids, Thrips, Spider Mite and Peat (Sciarid) Fly, and spray accordingly/use suitable predators, according to the supplier's instructions. 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. Pythium sometimes attacks the plant stem - pay good attention to glasshouse hygiene, using only fresh trays, pots, compost, water and clean benchtops, and keeping the plants growing steadily.

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