

Cultural Details: **Helichrysum**

Helichrysum bracteatum, or Straw Flower, is an important dried and to a lesser extent fresh, cut flower crop in the UK. Recent breeding work has resulted in compact versions for bedding and container work.

CUT FLOWER TYPES

Variety Selection

The King Size series comprises eight separate colours and a mixture. A pastel mixture is also listed in the Moles Seeds Catalogue.

Cultural

Sow directly into the ground into rows 45cm apart, at a gram of seed per 5 metres of row. Seed takes 1-2 weeks to germinate, then thin the seedlings out to around 10cm apart. The crop takes from 12-16 weeks to flower, and is usually sturdy enough to support itself.

Alternatively sow seed (1,400 per gram) in April 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 large celled plug trays at 2 seeds per cell. Cover the seeds with vermiculite, and cover trays with clear or milky polythene to maintain humidity, until the first seedlings are visible. Germination takes around 7 days at 15-18°C. Keep the germinating seedlings moist at all times.

Grow on at 15°C, and plant out when ready in rows 45cm apart, 30cm within the row. Planting from modules like this helps with weed control.

Pest and Disease

Aphids and whitefly may attack the crop – treat the plants with a suitable spray, according to the chemical supplier's guidelines. Maintain good glasshouse hygiene if raising the plants in plug trays first.

BEDDING/CONTAINER TYPES

Variety Selection

Chico is the most compact type at 30-40cm, with Bright Bikinis a little taller at 40-50cm.

Programming the Crop

Sow from February onwards, to provide flowering plants from late May. Sowing to flowering takes around 12 weeks.

Cultural

Sow seed (1,600 per gram) 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 large celled plug trays, or into seed trays. Cover the seeds with vermiculite, and cover trays with clear or milky polythene to maintain humidity, until the first seedlings are visible. Germination takes around 7 days at 15-18°C. Keep the germinating seedlings moist at all times.

When large enough, transfer to the sales container, either a 4- or 6-pack, or a 9-10cm pot. Alternatively, if plug grown, three plugs of matching habit can be planted into a 2 litre pot, for extra effect. Grow on at 10-15 °C until flowering – cool temperatures will promote a compact growth.

Growth Regulators

Growth regulators can be used (according to the manufacturers' guidelines, to ensure a compact habit.

Pest and Disease

Aphids and whitefly may attack the crop – treat the plants with a suitable spray, according to the chemical supplier's guidelines. 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. Monitor for presence of white patches on the foliage indicating Powdery Mildew and spray accordingly.

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