

Cultural Details: **Penstemon**

Penstemons are tender perennials in the UK, surviving most Winters in milder areas, but grown as annuals.

Variety Selection

The compact mixtures Navigator and Cambridge Mixed make good bedding plants, and container subjects for Summer sales. Giant-flowered and Tubular Bells produce large flowers on medium-tall spikes through the Summer. Jingle Bells is a tall type producing masses of flower spikes, and requires plenty of space.

Programming

Sow in February-March for selling as green plants in May and June, and flowering plants late June onwards.

Propagation and Growing on

Sow the small seeds (2,000 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. Cover the seeds lightly with vermiculite, and cover trays with clear or milky polythene to maintain humidity, until the first seedlings are visible. Germination takes around 2 weeks at 18-20°C. Keep the germinating seedlings moist at all times, without overwatering, and grow on at 15-18°C.

After about 5 weeks, move the plants on into large-celled plug trays. Once established, grow plants on at 12-15°C, until ready for potting into the sales container, a 9 or 10cm pot, and sell as green plants with a colour label, or in flower, moving the plants on again to 2 litre pots if required.

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, and check for the presence of pests such as aphids and whitefly, spraying accordingly. Powdery Mildew will cause white patches to appear on the foliage – treat plants, according to the chemical supplier's guidelines.

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