

Cultural Details: **Petunia**

A very popular and familiar subject for containers, hanging baskets and bedding schemes. Recent developments rival the cutting-raised types for vigour and flower power, with advantages of cost, disease avoidance and absence of royalty payments and propagation restrictions associated with the vegetatively-propagated types.

Raising from seed is relatively straightforward.

Variety Selection

Moles Seeds offers over 300 petunia varieties, each of which has something specific to offer.

Double flowered varieties such as the large-flowered Pirouette and Glorious, and the smaller multiflora Duo series, are for hanging basket use mixed with other species. Also for baskets, and ground cover, are the vigorous spreading varieties Wave, Avalanche, Explorer and Lady, which are perhaps best used on their own in baskets.

For outdoor bedding schemes, choose a weather-tolerant variety such as Storm. The recently-introduced Limbo series has a non-stretching habit which means it stays tidy in the pack, and once planted out.

For bedding plant sales in packs the choices are mainly between the grandiflora types such as Ultra, the multiflora types like Mirage which produce smaller flowers in greater numbers, and the very small flowered Fantasy (Junior Petunia).

The F2 varieties, whilst much cheaper than the F1 hybrids, have a much less compact habit and can look a little untidy.

Programming the Crop

Early February sowings will flower from early May, March sowings flower late May to June. The 'Spreading Types' (Wave, Explorer, Lady and Avalanche) can be started as early as January, to provide large plants early for incorporation into baskets.

Propagation and Growing-on

Seed is very small at around 9,000 per gram. Pelleted seed is available for many varieties (see catalogue for full details) allowing easier seed placement. If using pelleted seed make sure the compost remains moist so the pellets can break down and release the germinating seedling.

Sow into plug trays ideally to prevent root disturbance, or seedling trays. Germination takes 7-10 days at 20-24°C, when sown onto an open seed-sowing compost. Light is

required for germination (10 hours at 10 ftc (108 lux) is sufficient), and to stop the seedlings from stretching. Keep the germinating seedlings moist at all times.

Once the seed-leaves (coyledons) have emerged, begin liquid-feeding the young seedlings, and gradually reduce the soil moisture, to prevent stretching of the young plants. Throughout the culture, high light levels and moderate temperatures (10-15 °C) will encourage a compact habit.

After around 5 weeks the young plants are ready for transfer into 6- or 9-packs, or 8cm pots, or else can be grown on in cell trays then used for baskets and containers.

The spreading varieties are gross feeders to maintain their very rapid growth, other varieties will require a moderate liquid feed programme. Plants should be flowering in 5 (multiflora) to 6 (grandiflora) weeks from potting.

Growth Regulators

At the time of writing, the growth regulators B-nine and Bonzi can be used (according to the manufacturers' guidelines) on Petunias to ensure a compact habit, although it is preferable to control habit by careful use of water/feed/light/temperature regimes. Plant breeders are working on varieties which naturally stay compact until planted out, such as the Limbo series, to avoid the stretching problem altogether.

Pest and Disease

Apart from occasional aphid, whitefly, slug or caterpillar damage, which can relatively easily be dealt with, there are little disease problems associated with growing petunias.

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