

Cultural Details: **Polyanthus**

Polyanthus are mainly sold in 4- and 6-packs as bedding plants - green with a colour label in the Autumn, and in flower in the Spring. There is a smaller market for plants in flower in 8cm pots. As a bedding plant they are widely used by parks and estates, with a natural flowering time from late February to May.

Variety Selection

The Crescendo series has led the market for many years. As a less expensive option, the Pacific Giants do almost as well, and we have a couple of varieties for sale as hardy perennials, these being the old fashioned Gold Lace, and Primabella, a newer mixture with attractive bronzed foliage.

Programming the Crop

Polyanthus can be sown any time from mid May to mid July. An early sowing means the plants tend to be bigger, with more flowering crowns, by the time they flower. Sowings later than mid-July run an increasing risk of 'blindness' (non-flowering).

Propagation and Growing-on

There are around 1,000 seeds per gram. Sow into plug trays ideally to prevent root disturbance, or seedling trays. Germination takes around 14 days at 17-20°C, when sown onto an open seed-sowing compost, and covered lightly with vermiculite. Light is not necessary for germination. Temperatures above 21 °C will reduce germination, so in Summer choose a cool location away from direct sunlight, better still use a temperature- and humidity-controlled germination room.

Once the seed has 'chitted' a light covering of vermiculite will help to anchor the developing seedlings. Start moderate liquid feeding the plug plants after 2-3 weeks. Grow on at 15-17 °C.

After 9-10 weeks the young plants are ready for transfer into 4- or 6-packs, or 8cm pots. Maintain a liquid feed programme, and grow on as cool as possible. Keep the plants under protection, and water early in the day, as wet foliage will encourage leaf spot diseases and botrytis. Shade the plants in bright, sunny, hot weather. Reduce the temperature as low as possible with ventilation.

For plants to be grown to flowering, ideally keep the plants a few degrees above freezing. Reduce feeding as growth slows in Autumn, picking it up again once the plants bud up. As foliage increases on the plants, spacing the crop will reduce the presence of botrytis etc, and the need for cleaning up the plants prior to sale. Once buds are visible in the centre of the plants, development can be hastened by increasing the temperature to a maximum of 10 °C.

Growth Regulators

Unnecessary for polyanthus.

Pests and Diseases

Leaf yellowing can be a problem, for example where overwatering affects root function. Spraying or drenching with a liquid iron feed can help this.

Vine Weevils like Polyanthus; avoid a situation where different age crops are kept together, where the Weevils can spread from one to the other.

Aphids, Thrips and Whitefly can be controlled with a suitable spray programme – monitor the crop for signs of these pests.

Leafspots occur commonly on Polyanthus Crops – spray accordingly.

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