

MOLES SEEDS

Polyanthus and Primrose

Cultural Leaflet: ZZ310

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.

The popularity of Primroses is beyond question; they provide a riot of colour and scent at a time when little else is flowering. But Primrose market prices remain under pressure, so it is important that the seeds are grown to their full potential.

Variety Selection

The Crescendo series of Polyanthus 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, including the old fashioned Gold Lace.

For Primroses, we have varieties spanning the whole sales season, from late October to March – full details in the catalogue. Market prices are traditionally best late in the season, close to Mothers' Day, especially when supplies start to dry up, so choose a late flowering variety such as Last Dance for this period.

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).

In our own trials, for Primroses, we have found little effect on flowering date by varying sowing time, so would suggest sowing all varieties any time from the last week in June to the middle of July. Much earlier is unnecessary, and later sowings have an increasing likelihood of producing 'blind' (non-flowering) plants.

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 either Polyanthus or Primroses.

Pest and Disease

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 both Polyanthus and Primroses; 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 and primrose crops – spray accordingly.

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

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