

Cultural Details: **Stocks for Cut Flower Production**

Column stocks are an important cut flower crop with only a moderate heat requirement. They have long been popular in the UK, and good quality stems find a ready demand.

Programming

Early sowings made in November with planting in December will require a little heat to bring them into flower in early Spring. Later sowings (mid December to the end of January) require little or no heat, and give better quality blooms.

Propagation and Growing on

Sow the seeds (650 per gram) onto the surface of a free-draining, open, seed sowing compost, which **must** be thoroughly wetted with a suitable fungicide prior to sowing (to prevent damping-off diseases), and the trays allowed to drain. 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 7-10 days at 18-20 °C.

As soon as the seedlings have emerged completely (around 14 days after sowing), drop the temperature to 5-8 °C. After a few days, it will be apparent that some seeds have darker leaves than the others. These are the single-flowered plants and should be discarded. Prick out only the light green seedlings, which are the double flowered plants. As a guide, 5 grams of seed should result in 1,000 selected seedlings.

Transplant into large-celled plug trays or soil blocks, handling the seedlings as carefully as possible (by the leaves, not the stems). Maintain a temperature of 10-12°C.

Stocks should be planted into freshly sterilized soil with a low salt conductivity and a pH of 6.5-7.0. Grow quite hard for good quality stems, foliage and flower colour. A good level of potash should be used in the base dressing fertilizer, and a protective fungicide applied to the soil prior to planting will be of benefit, if the soil has not been sterilized. Follow manufacturers' guidelines when using all chemicals.

Plant up at around 15 x 15cm. Temperatures should be kept below 16 °C to ensure proper flower initiation – once flowers are initiated, then a temperature of 7 °C night, 11 °C day, slightly warmer under plastic, will give the best results. Keep the compost moist at all times, and feed weekly with a 2:1:3 ratio feed solution.

When 6-8 buds are open, pull up the whole plant, and stand in water until packing. Then cut off the roots and a few leaves, and pack singly, bunching smaller stems.

Pest and Disease

It is essential to pay good attention to glasshouse hygiene, using only fresh trays, water and clean soil to avoid damping-off diseases. Check for the presence of pests such as aphids and leaf miner, spraying accordingly. Monitor the crop for Downy Mildew also.

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