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# How to Grow Mock Orange: The Complete Guide



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Botanical Name:	<i>Philadelphus</i> spp.
Plant Type:	Shrubs and Bushes
Sun	Full Sun,

FREE GUIDE!



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# Learn how to plant, grow, and care for mock orange shrubs

By [Andy Wilcox](#)

**Last Updated:** March 21, 2025



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Mock orange shrubs—covered in white blooms in spring and early summer—are loved for their fragrant flowers that smell like orange blossoms. They grow well in nearly any soil and most climates. Learn how to plant, grow, and care for mock oranges.

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## About Mock Orange

Some folks consider mock orange (*Philadelphus* spp.) to be an old-fashioned shrub. Many older cultivars or original species plantings can get quite large and open, taking up space often lacking in modern small yards. However many new cultivars are modest-sized, and these fragrant flowering shrubs are perfect for adding graceful charm and sweet scent to the garden or yard.

Modern cultivars and some pruning can keep them in check, or you can let them go nuts at the back of the yard to create a thicket of blooms and stems, home to many songbirds and pollinators.

Mock oranges are a group of deciduous, woody, [perennial shrubs](#) in the genus *Philadelphus*. Several species are commonly grown in nurseries and used to breed many cultivars. Nearly all are deciduous. Depending on the species, mock oranges can be native to the Americas, Europe, or Asia and are not generally considered invasive. Most mock orange culti-

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These shrubs are easy to grow and are quite tough and resilient. They are grown for their fragrant spring flowers, but also useful for borders, hedges, and screens. They're widely adaptable to soil and will reliably bloom every year even if you forget about them.



*Close-up of Philadelphus (mock-orange)*

- [How to Grow Weigela Shrubs \(The Complete Guide\)](#)
- [How to Grow a Honeysuckle Shrub](#)
- [Growing Oleander: The Complete Guide](#)

## PLANTING

# When to Plant Mock Orange

Due to availability in the garden center, the usual time for planting mock oranges is springtime after the last frosts have passed. However, like most perennials and shrubs, they can also be planted in early autumn. Aim to have fall plantings in the ground at least 4 weeks before the frosts come to let them establish before going dormant.

# Where to Plant Mock Orange

sunlight in the afternoon is beneficial.

They'll survive in heavier shade but can get leggy and bloom less. These easy-care shrubs will [do fine in nearly any soil pH](#).

They prefer moist but well-draining soil and will suffer in perpetually wet or poorly draining soils.

Compact varieties make excellent specimens marking the edge of perennial beds or fences. A pair of mock oranges planted near the door allows you to enjoy their sweet scent and provides a spot for songbirds to sit. As a child on the farm, we had a planting of mock oranges and wild plums that had been planted years ago around the power pole. It grew into a thicket of blossoms and buzzing bees, providing endless [habitat for songbirds](#) and little critters and a play spot for me. It was a great spot to choose for hide-and-seek.

Mock oranges not only make great specimens, but they can also make a lovely screen during summer when you'd like a

area between the garage and the neighbor's fence. They're available in large or compact forms to suit any space need.

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## How to Plant Mock Orange

Planting mock oranges is easy, and you can stick a pair of them in the ground in only a few minutes. A garden spade, pruners, a hose, and some mulch are all you'll need. Remember that while a containerized mock orange from the nursery can wait around a bit in its pot, any bare-root stock should be planted as soon as



## For containerized mock orange:

- Remove the mock orange from its nursery pot by squeezing the edges and lightly collapsing the pot inward. If the plant doesn't work free, try watering it thoroughly and waiting for half an hour.
- Trim any circling roots and loosen the edges of the rootball. You may need to score the rootball with a knife or trowel.
- Prepare a hole twice the size of the original pot. The hole should have sloping sides like a bowl.
- Set the mock orange in the hole and adjust so the soil level of the plant's rootball matches or is slightly higher than that of the surrounding ground. Dig or fill in as necessary. Ensure the bottom of the hole is loosened, not compacted.
- Replace the soil you removed, tucking it around the shrub and applying light but firm pressure to eliminate air pockets around the roots.

ring of soil around the plant to help hold the water in place while it soaks in.

- Apply a 2–3 inch-thick layer of mulch, but avoid piling it up around the stem.

## **For bareroot mock oranges:**

- Carefully remove the shrub from its packaging and soak the roots in a bucket of clean water for 2–3 hours.
- While the plant is soaking, dig a hole slightly deeper than the roots and at least 6 inches wider on all sides. You need room to spread the roots out without bending them.
- Test fit the shrub and adjust the hole as necessary. The mock orange should be planted with the crown just at or slightly higher than the surrounding ground level. A stain on the stem often indicates how deep it was grown at the nursery.
- Trim any broken roots, spread them out, and fill in the soil, taking care to keep the shrub upright. Avoid bending roots in a J shape—it's easy to do at the

## GROWING

Mock oranges are tough, resilient shrubs that will live in your yard for years or decades. They're a huge magnet for pollinators and hummingbirds in spring and early summer, and their graceful arching habit is easy to keep trimmed with a snip here and there.



*A spring flowering shrub with heavenly white flowers that smell like orange blossoms. Credit: Kabar*

## How to Grow Mock Orange

Newly planted mock oranges should be watered weekly unless significant rain has fallen. As they establish, they won't need supplemental watering and will be happy

Mock oranges can be fertilized annually in early spring with a general-purpose slow-release fertilizer. Mulching will prevent weeds and grass from growing up among the stems of younger plants and prevent you being tempted to take the string trimmer too close.

## Pruning Mock Orange

If needed or desired, mock oranges should be pruned in summer after the big spring flowering push has ended. They flower on old wood, so [pruning](#) should be done shortly after most of the flowers have finished. Fall or winter pruning will remove next year's flower buds, while mid-summer pruning will encourage new green growth, budding, and flowering the next year. Pruning to remove dead, damaged, or crossing and twisted branches can be done at any time.

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When pruning, use hand pruners or loppers and cut back to just above a healthy branch or bud. Use sharp tools, wear gloves, and sanitize your pruners with rubbing alcohol between plants.

Like many woody flowering shrubs, mock orange can get overgrown and excessively woody and start to look less lush. Shrubs needing renewal can be pruned hard over the course of 3 years. Remove 1/3 of the shrub in year one, choosing the oldest and largest diameter branches. Use a hand saw to cut them right to the ground. In year two, remove the next 1/3, focusing again on the oldest and largest. The third year, remove the remaining old branches, leaving no part of the shrub which is more than 3 years old.

Check out this excellent publication on

great diagrams and explanation on pruning mock orange and other woody shrubs and trees.

## Types

- ‘Pearls of Perfume’ has a compact habit and beautiful double blooms with the characteristic orange blossom scent. It’s hardy in USDA Zones 4–9 and is easily kept at around 4 feet tall and wide.
- ‘Blizzard’ lives up to its name and is hardy down to frigid USDA Zone 3. It’s also a profuse bloomer, with a blizzard of single, four-petal white fragrant flowers in spring. This cultivar was developed in Alberta, Canada, so you know it’s cold hardy.
- ‘Minnesota Snowflake’ is a full-sized mock orange with big double blooms. It can reach 8–10 feet tall and wide and is hardy in USDA Zones 4–8.

## HARVESTING

Mock orange branches in bloom make an

cut flower bouquets. Choose single long stems just beginning to open.

- Cut stems on a slant.
- Place harvested mock orange stems immediately in water. Don't wait until you get to the house.
- Cut a longer stem than needed for your bouquet and re-trim once in the house.
- Combine harvesting and pruning. Snag stems for the vase that you were likely going to prune anyway due to out of control growth or legginess.

## GARDENING PRODUCTS



## PESTS/DISEASES

When planted in a suitable location, mock oranges are rarely bothered by pests or diseases and even tolerate pollution and salt spray quite well.

## WIT AND WISDOM

- Mock oranges have earned their common name not for their resemblance to an orange tree or any fruit but for the fragrance of their flowers. Many find the showy white blossoms have a citrus fragrance, light and sweet but never heavy or thick (can a scent be thick?).
- Mock orange branches in flower make excellent and fragrant additions to cut flower bouquets and typically last a week or longer in the vase.
- Mature mock oranges are moderately deer resistant, but young plants and new growth may be browsed. Rabbits are sometimes a problem for



**SHRUBS AND TREES****ABOUT THE AUTHOR****Andy Wilcox**

Andy Wilcox is a flower farmer and master gardener with a passion for soil health, small producers, forestry, and horticulture.

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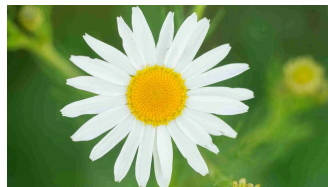
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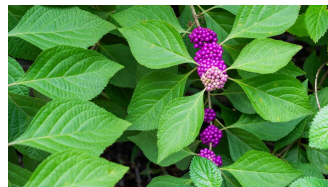
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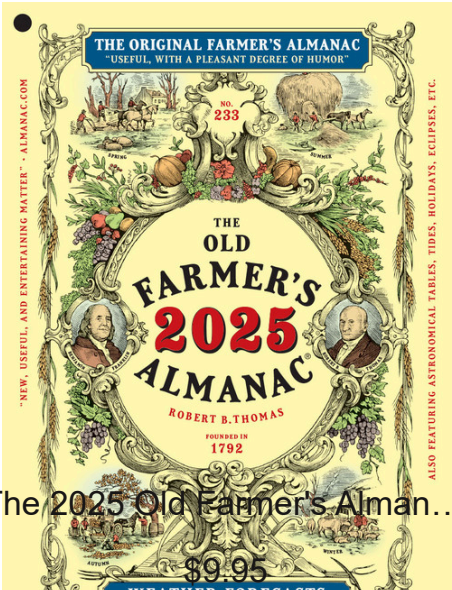
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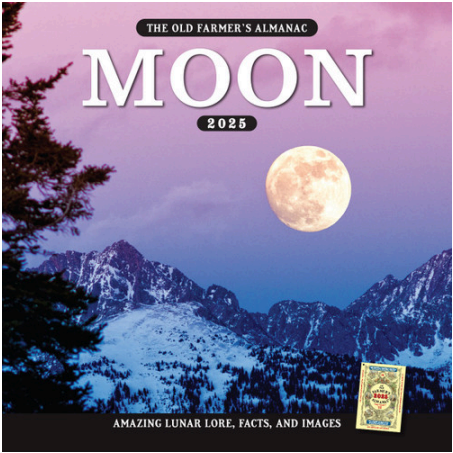
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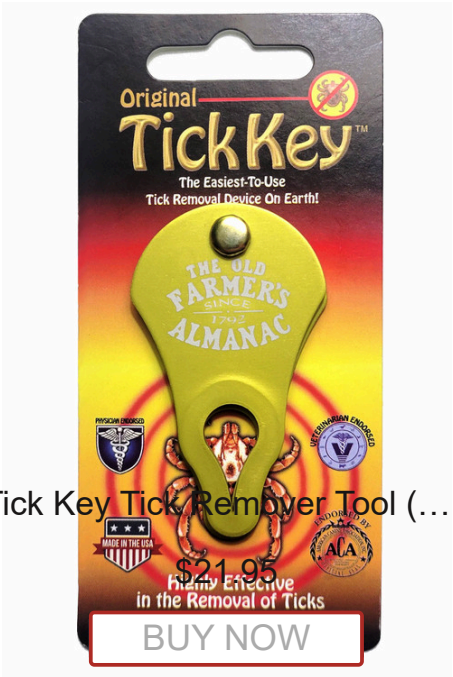
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