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# How to Grow Dianthus: The Complete Dianthus Flower Guide

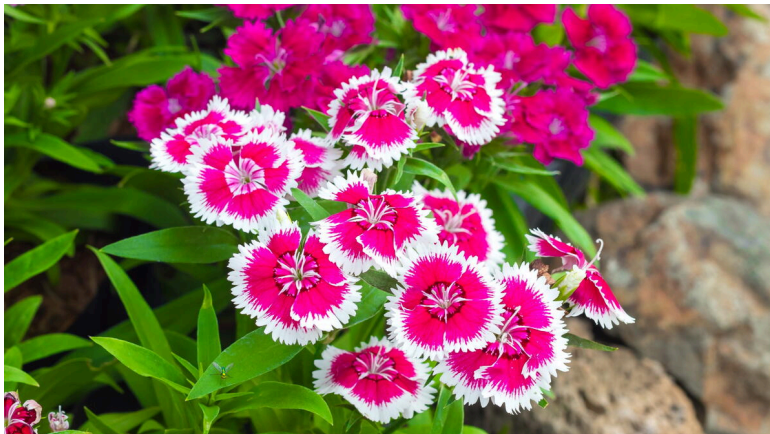


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Botanical Name:  
*Dianthus*  
*spp.*  
Common Name:

Plant Type:  
Flower

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# Planting, Growing, and Caring for Dianthus

By [Catherine Boeckmann](#)

**Last Updated:** March 17, 2025



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Darling dianthus flowers bring beguiling fragrance and cheerful color to sunny borders or containers. Also known as “pinks,” this hardy, adaptable plant ranges from low-growing annuals to taller perennials (such as carnations). If you dead-head, dianthus will keep reblooming from spring sometimes until fall frost! Learn more about how to plant dianthus.

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# About Dianthus Flowers

Ancient Greek botanist Theophrastus (c.371–c.287 B.C.) gave the *Dianthus* genus its name: “divine flower” (*dios* + *anthos*). Ever since, gardeners have been smitten with these plants’ charms: a sweet and spicy fragrance and lovely fringed blossoms in many colors (intense pink, white, lavender, yellow, red, bicolor).

Dianthus plants have been cultivated for thousands of years. They were popular in ancient Greece, where they were considered a divine flower and dedicated to Zeus. The name dianthus comes from the Greek word *dios* for “god” and *anthos* for “flower.” They were very popular in Tudor and Edwardian times when they were called by picturesque names like gillyflower, pheasant’s ear, and sops-in-wine. Some antique varieties, like ‘Fenbow’s Clove Pink’ can be traced back to the 14th century. Colonists brought

gillyflowers is noted in America as early as 1676.

Dianthus are popular for many reasons. Besides being hardy and adaptable, they are also long-blooming and will flower prolifically through the summer season if you deadhead the faded flowers. And their fragrance is lovely—similar to cloves. The flowers also attract butterflies, hummingbirds, and other pollinators to the garden. And, they're deer-resistant!

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The common name “pinks” is not because

edges of their 5-petal blooms that look like they've been cut with pinking shears.

Even when they are not in bloom, dianthus are attractive plants. Most form neat mounds and many have fine, blue-green foliage making them perfect front of the border plants.

## **Is Dianthus a Perennial or Annual?**

Dianthus can be annual, biennial, or perennial. Dianthus genus covers over 300 species; as a gardeners' favorite, they have been extensively bred and hybridized. Most varieties are 10 to 20 inches tall, but dianthus varieties range from annual creeping ground covers to 24-inch (or longer) long-stemmed perennials (such as carnations) suitable for cutting. This genus also includes Sweet Williams (*D. barbatus*), which are biennial or short-lived perennials. Depending on the variety, dianthus bring cheer to sunny garden borders, rock gardens, or

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## PLANTING

Dianthus demand full sun (they fail to thrive in shade) and well-draining soil (standing water will rot the roots).

Improve the soil drainage if necessary (e.g., mix in compost with heavy soil).

### When to Plant Dianthus

- Direct-seed outdoors in early spring when a light frost is still possible. If transplanting a small nursery plant, plant during the cooler months in spring or fall to encourage deep rooting.
- If sowing seeds indoors, start them 10 to 12 weeks before the last spring frost.

### How to Plant Dianthus

- When direct-seeding outdoors, only cover lightly with soil; seeds need light to germinate.
- If transplanting, space plants 6 to 12 inches apart (depending on variety) for good air circulation. Set so the crown is level with soil surface and water lightly.
- If sowing seeds indoors, press seeds lightly into moist potting medium; cover lightly and keep moist. Apply bottom heat. When seedlings break through the soil, place seed trays in a sun-drenched window. Annual germinate in about 10 days, perennials in 3 weeks. Harden off and transplant seedlings when they have four sets of leaves and there is no danger of frost.



Photo: Michael Sean  
O'Leary/Shutterstock



- Avoid mulch, especially close to the stem; good air circulation is needed to avoid crown rot.
- Water only when soil is dry and be careful not to overwater.
- Fertilize a few times during the growing season with a balanced fertilizer (equal amounts of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium) or a phosphate-rich tomato fertilizer.
- Deadhead faded flowers, removing the stems, too, for more blooms.
- Shear plants back after flowering in late summer to encourage a second set of flowers later in the season.
- Many varieties self-seed if blossoms are not removed.
- At season's end, leave evergreen foliage for fall and winter interest or cut stems back to 1 to 2 inches above the soil surface.
- Divide established plants every 2 to 3 years in early spring or after flowering.

## Types

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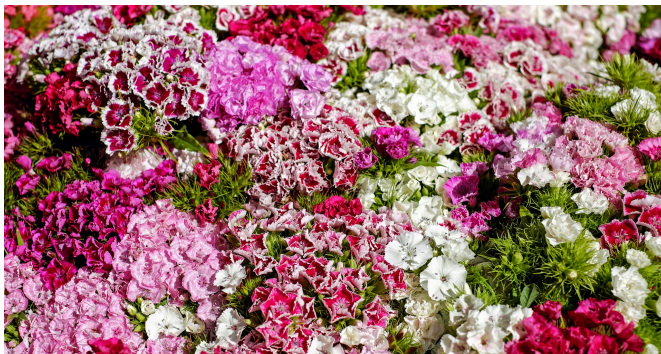
American Dianthus Society, these are the best varieties for home gardens:

- Hardy rock garden pinks: **alpine pinks** (*Dianthus alpinus*) and **Cheddar pinks** (*D. gratianopolitanus*) and their hybrids; strongly scented, small flowers on 2- to 6-inch-tall plants; grassy gray-green leaves; hardy in Zones 3 to 9
- **Cottage pinks** (*D. plumarius*): clove-scented, lilac-pink flowers; grass-like foliage, 12 to 15 inches tall; deadhead for rebloom in fall; hardy in Zones 3 to 9
- **China pinks** (*D. chinensis*): lightly scented flowers on 6- to 10-inch-tall stalks over 3- to 4-inch-high mounds; hardy perennials in zones 7 to 10
- **Clusterheads**, e.g., **Sweet William** (*D. barbatus*): clusters of single or double white, pink, red, or salmon flowers on 12- to 24-inch-tall stems; annual, biennial, or short-lived perennial; hardy in Zones 3 to 9
- **Carnations** (*D. caryophyllus*), aka the

blue-green foliage; hardy in zones 5 to 8. Choose hardy perennial border carnations (aka “wild carnations”) over frost-tender varieties that require a greenhouse.

Miscellaneous fragrant species hardy in zones 3 to 8 include:

- **Sand pink** (*D. arenarius*): 6- to 10-inch-tall deeply fringed, white blossoms
- **Noe's pink** (*D. petraeus ssp. noeanus*), an alpine species with white flowers
- **Superb pink** (*D. superbis*), aka fringed pink, for its feathery, deeply cut petals.
- **'Grenadin Yellow'** (*D. caryophyllus*): 16 to 20 inches tall, creamy yellow blooms



## HARVESTING

Dianthus make excellent cut flowers.

Many varieties have a spicy fragrance in addition to a long vase life of 7 to 21 days.

Cut flowers for arrangements when the are just opening. Cut the bottom of the stems at a slant, just above a node on the stem. Remove leaves that are submerged in the water. Replace the water every 3 days. Re-cut the stems after 1 week.

## GARDENING PRODUCTS



Dianthus is deer-resistant.

Diseases: aster yellows, Botrytis blight, leaf spot, root and stem rots, rust, wilt

Pests: aphids, grasshoppers, slugs and snails, sow bugs

## WIT AND WISDOM

- In Tudor and Edwardian times dianthus had several names: gillyflower, pheasant's ear, and sops-in-wine. It is also known as cottage pink and clove pink.
- Dianthus flower petals are edible; remove and discard the bitter petal base before using.
- “Hot July brings cooling showers, apricots and gillyflowers.”  
–Sara Coleridge, British writer (1802–52)

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## COOKING NOTES

Dianthus flowers are edible; the petals are sometimes candied and used as edible decoration. Discard the bitter petal base before using and avoid ingesting the foliage and stems, as they can cause indigestion.

**FLOWERS**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Catherine Boeckmann



Catherine Boeckmann loves nature, stargazing, and gardening so it's not surprising that she and The Old Farmer's Almanac found each other. She leads digital content for the Almanac website, and is also a certified master gardener in the state of Indiana. [Read More from Catherine Boeckmann](#)

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**Char (not verified)** 4 weeks ago

Very informative and very thorough. The author is knowledgeable about the subject and one can tell she has researched the topic to write competently about it.

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**Elizabeth (not verified)** 7 months 2 weeks ago



REPLY

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**Jodie G (not verified)** 11 months 3 weeks ago

I planted a small bunch of dianthus in our landscape area at front, that was five years ago.

They have spread to cover the edge over a large area. In spring and summer we have masses of blooms, during the winter months it . a lovely blue green foliage for color interest. But the best part is that it requires almost no maintenance.

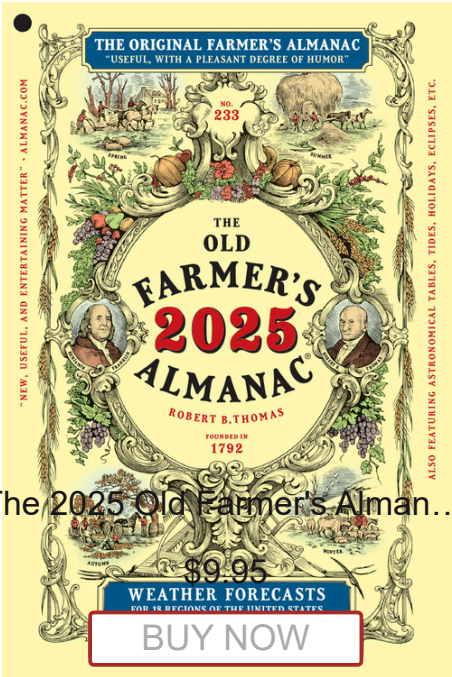
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**Frances Gale (not verified)** 2 years 3 months ago

I love dianthus, I have a wide variety of them in my wildflower gardens. My favorite is Sweet Williams.

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