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How to Grow Delphiniums: The Complete Delphinium Flower Guide



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Botanical Name:

Delphinium

Plant Type:

Flower

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Planting, Growing, and Caring for Delphinium

By [Catherine Boeckmann](#)

Last Updated: March 26, 2025



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Oh, the delightful delphinium! The stalwart of many summer flower gardens, these showy perennials are grown for their long, colorful spikes in blue and other gorgeous hues. Flowering all summer, delphiniums are butterfly and hummingbird magnets, too! Learn how to plant, grow, and care for delphiniums.

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Delphinium is a genus in the *Ranunculaceae* family. (They're often confused with [larkspur](#), which are a different plant species.) There are more than 300 delphinium species, so there is quite a variety of heights, from dwarf hybrids to 6-foot tall beauties, so they can be planted in the front, middle, or back of a perennial border. The blue delphinium is most common, but varieties also come in gorgeous shades of violet, pink, white, red, and purple. They are popular in both cottage-style and [cutting gardens](#).

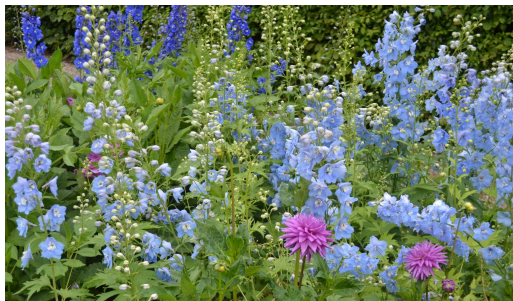


Photo: Edita Medeina/Shutterstock

Most delphiniums are short-lived perennials, lasting 2 or 3 years in the garden. Some varieties will bloom throughout the entire summer if the plants are cut back regularly. Other hybrids bloom from early

What's important to know about delphiniums is that they will thrive if you meet their specific conditions. Delphiniums prefer moist, cool summers; they do not fare well in hot, dry weather or sudden wind or rain, which can knock them down. Most varieties will need staking. See more details below.

Are Delphinium Poisonous?

Yes, delphiniums are highly poisonous. If seeds and seedlings are ingested, they can cause nausea, twitching muscles, paralysis, and even death. This is mainly a concern for grazing animals such as cattle, horses, and sheep, and it is also a caution to gardeners with small children.

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- [Creating a Rain Garden: Rain Garden Designs and Plants](#)

PLANTING

Choose a spot in full sun with shelter from strong winds. Stake early in the growing season; delphiniums' heavy flower spikes grow on hollow stems, which can easily break. Soil should be fertile, well-draining, and neutral to slightly alkaline (pH of 6.0 to 7.5). Prior to planting, loosen the garden soil and mix in 2 to 4 inches of compost or aged manure. Do a soil test and, if needed, add lime, wood ashes, or a mixture of the two to this alkaline-loving perennial.

When to Plant Delphinium

- Plant delphinium in the spring as a

- To start indoors, sow seeds about 10 weeks before the last spring frost.

How to Plant Delphinium

- Dig a hole twice the diameter of the plant's container.
- Make sure that the top of the root ball is level with the surface soil.
- Fill in with soil.
- Water thoroughly

GROWING

- Delphiniums are heavy feeders. Apply a balanced liquid fertilizer starting in early spring every 2 to 3 weeks.
- Insert sturdy stake supports no later than mid-spring or when the plants reach 12 inches high.
- Do not allow the soil to dry out, but avoid puddling. Water plants during the summer if rainfall is less than 1 inch per week.
- For ideal flower spikes, thin side shoots at 3 inches high, leaving 2 or 3 shoots on young plants and 5 to 7

- Deadhead by cutting spent flower spikes back to small, flowering side shoots.
- After delphiniums have finished blooming, cut flower stalks to the ground, and new, though smaller, flower stalks will develop. The flowers will survive the coming cold days and even light frosts. (See local frost dates.)
- Every 3 to 4 years, divide plants in spring: Remove and replant the new little plants growing around the outside of the clump. Discard the hard old heart.



Photo: Arty Alison/Shutterstock

Types

Delphiniums are hardy in Zones 3 to 7.

Most varieties today are not wild but the

ture. Dwarf-, medium-size, and tall (6 feet and up) hybrids are available:

- **Belladonna Group:** blue flowers native to North America; easier to grow and longer-lived than varieties in the Elatum Group (below); upright, loose, and branching perennials; secondary flower spikes extend bloom period into autumn; 3 to 4 feet tall. 'Blue Donna' has clear, blue flowers.
- **Elatum Group:** tallest varieties in shades of violet, blue, pink, and/or white; short-lived; reach 6 feet tall or more. 'Aurora Deep Purple' has purple flowers with a white center.
- **Pacific Hybrids:** 3-inch violet, blue, and pink flowers; short-lived; tolerate warm/hot climates as annuals; giant (3- to 6-foot) heirlooms and dwarf hybrids. 'King Arthur', 5 to 6 feet tall, has plum flowers with white centers.

HARVESTING

This elegant flower is good for a cutting garden. Cut flowers for arrangements

and one bud is starting to open. Vase life is 6 to 8 days.

GARDENING PRODUCTS



PESTS/DISEASES

Diseases: aster yellows, blight, leaf spot, downy mildew, powdery mildew, mold, crown and root rot, gray mold, rust, viruses, smut, and wilts.

Pests: cyclamen mites, nematodes, slugs and snails

WIT AND WISDOM

- The name “delphinium” is derived from the Greek word *delphis*, meaning “dolphin,” as the closed flower buds were said to resemble a dolphin’s nose.
- The centers of delphinium flowers are called “bees.”
- Don’t get discouraged if you try to grow delphinium from seed. Use fresh seeds; put them in egg cartons in the fridge using damp seed mix; after most have sprouted, put them under a bright light. Normal to cool room temp.

FLOWERS

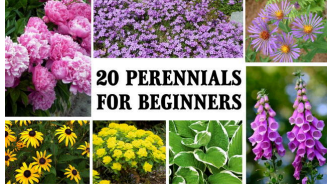
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

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COMMENTS

ADD A COMMENT

patricia (not verified) 1 year 7 months ago

Will the seeds winter over outside, or do I have to keep inside and germinate in the spring to later plant outside?

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REPLY

The Editors 1 year 7 months ago

Hi Patricia,

Delphinium seeds need a cold period for spring germination. The recommended approach is to harvest your seeds once the flowers have all faded. At that point, cut down the stalks to the ground and hang the stalks indoors to dry. Once the seed pods begin to split (after a few weeks), remove the small seeds and store them in an airtight container in the refrigerator during the winter months. About 10 weeks before your last frost date, remove the seeds and begin the germination process indoors. Plant the seeds in evenly moist soil (just not too wet) covering the seeds with about 1/8 inch of soil. Seedlings should emerge in 21 to 28 days. Once seedlings appear, provide plenty of light. Before planting outdoors, harden off your seedlings.

REPLY

melanie wilsden (not verified) 11

How many seeds do I need to plant in one place if I am starting them in a pot or the ground?

REPLY

Lisa (not verified) 2 years 9 months ago

My delphinium is huge and extremely sturdy. The flowers are starting to fall away and I noticed what appears to be green seed pods. Can I collect these and sow them for more plants? I only have the one and it comes back every year, but no others have developed around it.

REPLY

The Editors 2 years 9 months ago

Once your delphinium flowers have all bloomed and gone away, it is time to cut the plant's stalks to the ground. Hang the stalks, which include the green seed pods, in a spot to dry. After a few weeks, you will notice that the pods begin to brown and split.

stalk a shake. Break open the pods to remove the tiny seeds and then store them in an air-tight container or zippered plastic bag in your refrigerator over the winter. Delphinium seeds need a cold period over the winter for spring germination. You can start the seeds indoors 8 to 10 weeks before the last frost.

REPLY

Denyse (not verified) 3 years 1 month ago

When you say young ones are poisonous, do you mean 'early in the Spring' young or a plant that is one or two years old, rather than a mature plant of 20+ years? Thank you.

REPLY

The Editors 2 years 11 months ago

The new leaf growth of delphiniums tends to be the most poisonous exposed part of the plant, so del-

in the year than they are later in the year.

REPLY

Maryann Starrett (not verified) 3 years 11 months ago

Are they poisonous if chewed by a dog ?

REPLY

Brett (not verified) 2 years 10 months ago

Yes.. (poisonous means poisonous)

... kinda like drinking gasoline. If humans can't drink it. Then any other living thing probably shouldn't drink gas..

.... next question I'm assuming

Are fires hot? Since fire burns me, will it burn my cat? Hahaha

People people people...

Billie Jo Hodges (not verified) 3

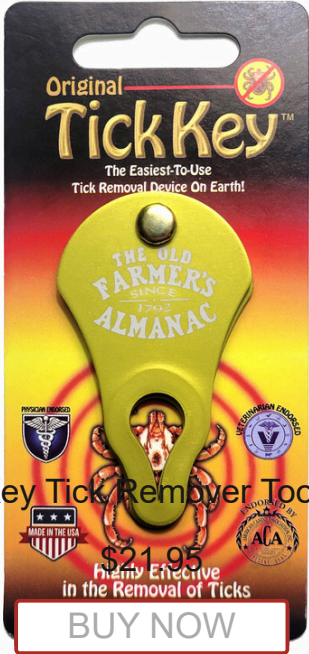
weeks 5 days ago

The sarcasm is not necessary and adds nothing to the content of the question or response. Just shows bad character.

REPLY

MORE COMMENTS

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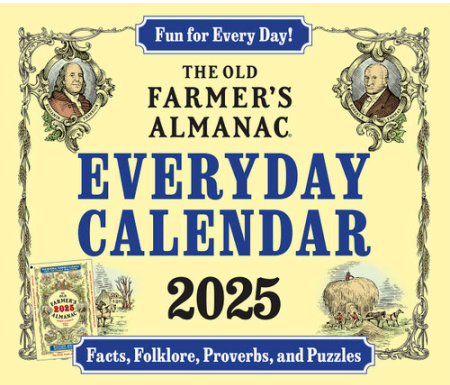


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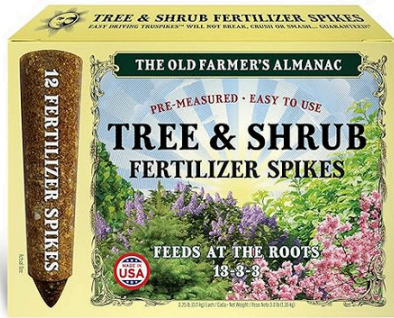
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