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# How to Grow Petunias: The Complete Petunia Flower Guide



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Botanical Name:  
*Petunia*  
*spp.*

Plant Type:  
Flower

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# Planting. Growing. and Caring

By [Catherine Boeckmann](#)**Last Updated:** April 23, 2025

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Pretty petunias are popular because of their exceptionally long flowering period. As with most annuals, they get leggy by midsummer, so you'll want to prune the shoots back by half. See more tips on planting and caring for petunias to keep them blooming.

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## About Petunias

Petunias are treated as annuals in most areas but can be grown as tender perennials in Zones 9 to 11. The flowers come in

These colorful annuals can really add pop to a front lawn and are often used in borders, containers, hanging baskets, or even as seasonal ground covers. Some even have a slight fragrance. Their height can vary from 6 inches to 18 inches, and they can spread along the ground anywhere from 18 inches to 4 feet.

## Types of Petunias

Petunias are divided into different groups, mainly based on flower size:

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1. **Multiflora** petunias are the most durable and prolific. They have

in a mixed border (because they are more tolerant to wet weather).

2. **Grandiflora** petunias have very large flowers and are best grown in containers or hanging baskets (because they are more susceptible to rain damage). These large petunias often do not fare as well in the south because they're prone to rot during humid, hot summers.

3. **Floribundas:** Floribundas are intermediate between the grandiflora and multiflora groups. Like the multiflora varieties, they are free-flowering and produce medium-sized blooms.

4. **Millifloras:** Milliflora petunias are much smaller than any other petunias on the market. The flowers are only 1 to 1½ inches wide, but they are prolific and last all season!

5. **Spreading or Trailing Petunias:**

These are low-growing and can spread as much as 3 to 4 feet.

Because the flowers form along the entire length of each stem, they form a beautiful, colorful ground cover.



#### Read Next

- [How to Grow Impatiens: The Complete Impatiens Flower Guide](#)
- [How to Grow Geraniums: The Complete Geranium Flower Guide](#)
- [How to Grow Pansies: The Complete Pansy Flower Guide](#)

## PLANTING

Petunias need full sun, or they will become spindly. They don't tend to flower well in shade.

The soil should drain well and not stay overly wet, especially in containers. It should also be moderately fertile to promote the best growth. Amend poor soil with [finished compost](#) prior to planting.

- It's easiest to buy young plants from a nursery that sells petunias in flats. Look for plants that are short and compact. Leggy petunias with tons of flowers already won't settle in as fast.
- If you want to grow petunias from seed, start the seeds indoors 8 to 10 weeks before your last spring frost date. ([See your local frost dates.](#))
- Plant young petunias outdoors after your last spring frost date, but keep a close eye on the weather forecast and protect young plants from late frosts.

## How to Plant Petunias

- Petunia seeds are very small (dust-like!) and need lots of light in order to germinate.
- When the young plants have three leaves, plant them outside.
- Space the plants about 1 foot apart.
- If you're planting petunias in [containers](#), use a container potting mix that will drain well.



## GROWING

- Petunias are fairly heat-tolerant, so you shouldn't have to worry about watering them frequently. A thorough watering once a week should be sufficient (unless there are prolonged periods of drought in your area). Avoid watering shallowly, as this encourages shallow roots.
  - **Note:** The spreading types of petunias and those in containers will require more frequent watering than those planted in the ground.
- Fertilize petunias monthly with a balanced fertilizer to support their rapid growth and heavy blooming. Double-flowered cultivars enjoy a biweekly dose of fertilizer.



## What to Do With Leggy Petunias

- By midsummer, most petunias tend to get leggy, producing blossoms at the tips of long, leafless stems. To keep petunias tidy and flowering, we prune the shoots back to about half their length. This will encourage more branching and more flowers.
- After pruning, fertilize and water the plants well to force out new growth and flowers. The plants may look raggedy at first, but they'll rebound with more color and blooms.
  - Older garden petunia plants can be pruned hard (within a few inches of the base) to re-encourage vigor, especially in cooler climates, but keep the remaining leaves.
- Remove faded, old, or dead blossoms (a practice called "deadheading") to both improve blooms and attractiveness, especially for the larger-flowered petunias. Deadheading prevents seed pods from competing with blooms for the plant's food supplies. Clippings can

# Types

## Multifloras

- **‘Carpet Series’** is very popular. They are compact, early blooming with 1½- to 2-inch blooms that come in a wide variety of colors, and are ideal for ground cover.
- **‘Primetime’** series stay compact and uniform, covered with 2¼-inch flowers.
- **‘Heavenly Lavender’** is an early, compact, double, deep lavender blue with 3-inch blooms on 12- to 14-inch plants.

## Grandifloras

- **‘Sugar Daddy’** (*Petunia* Daddy Series), which sports purple flowers with dark veins.
- **‘Rose Star’** (*Petunia* Ultra Series), whose flowers look striped because of its rose-pink flowers with a white center.

## Floribundas

- **‘Celebrity’** series petunias are compact and rain-tolerant. The flowers reach 2½ to 3 inches across.
- **‘Madness’** series petunias have big, 3-inch flowers in many veined and solid colors. They are compact and bloom until frost. They bounce back well after rain.
- **‘Double Madness’** petunias are compact and floriferous with big, 3-inch flowers all through the summer. Like their single counterparts, ‘Double Madness’ petunias bounce back within hours of a rainstorm.

## Millifloras

- **‘Fantasy’** forms neat, compact mounds.

## Trailing Petunias

- **‘Purple Wave’** was the first cultivar in the class of spreading petunias. It produces large blooms of deep rose-purple. It is tolerant of summer heat, drought, and rain damage. ‘Purple

as ground-hugging as the original.

They are weather tolerant, disease re-

sistant, and heavy-blooming.

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PESTS/DISEASES

Petunias have few serious insect or dis-

ease pests, though aphids and slugs can

be an issue. Avoid wetting the foliage and

flowers when watering to help

prevent disease.

Petunia Pests and Diseases

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Pest/Disease	Type	Symptoms	Control/Prevention
<a href="#">Aphids</a>	Insect	Misshapen/yellow leaves; distorted flowers; leaf drop; sticky “honey-dew” (excretion) on leaves; sooty, black mold	Knock off with water spray; apply <a href="#">insecticidal soap</a> ; inspect new plants carefully; use slow-release fertilizers; avoid excess nitrogen; encourage aphid predators such as lacewings, lady beetles/bugs, spiders
<a href="#">Slugs/snails</a>	Mollusk	Irregular holes in leaves/flowers; slimy secretion on plants/soil; seedlings “disappear”	Handpick; avoid thick bark mulch; use copper plant collars; avoid overhead watering; lay boards on soil in evening, in morning lift and dispose of pests in hot, soapy water; drown in deep container of 1/2 inch of beer or of sugar water and yeast sunk to ground level; apply 1-inch-wide strip of <a href="#">diatomaceous earth</a> around plants

FLOWERS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Catherine Boeckmann

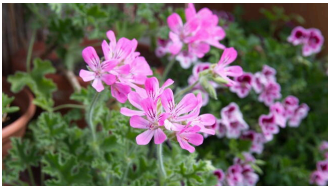


Catherine Boeckmann loves nature, stargazing, and gardening so it’s not surprising that she and The Old Farmer’s Almanac found each other. She leads digital content for the Almanac website, and is also a certified master gardener in the state of Indiana. [Read More from Catherine Boeckmann](#)

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# COMMENTS

ADD A COMMENT

**Sharon (not verified)** 7 months 3 weeks ago

Relatively new to Southern Colorado from the West coast. Petunias have been prolific growers here, and the deer leave them alone! Not my hollyhocks! Destroyed them! Solor electric fence next year! I just replanted more seed. I'll Add about 6 inches of pine needles before snow. It's challenging!

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REPLY

**Margaret Wong (not verified)** 11 months 2 weeks ago

Love your articles. I'm a new gardener and want to learn all I can. Since they are tearing down a lot of nature to build houses. So I'm trying to build a bird, hummingbird, butterfly and bee habitat. Thank you so much for articles.



REPLY

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**CARMEN (not verified)** 11 months 2 weeks ago

I LOVE THE ARTICLES ABOUT GARDENING,  
FLOWERS, ETS.

I HAVE PETUNIAS IN CONTAINERS AND  
HANGING BASKETS AND AM WORRIED  
BECAUSE OF THE CONSTANT RAIN FOR  
SEVERAL DAYS AND STILL FUTURE RAIN.  
SHOULD I BRING THE CONTAINERS ON MY  
PORCH? PROBLEM IS IF I DO THIS THEY WILL  
NOT GET MUCH SUN WHEN THERE IS SUN  
WHICH HAS BEEN VERY LITTLE IN THE LAST  
2 WEEKS AND CONTINUING. WHAT CAN I  
DO?

REPLY

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**Evelyn Merrill (not verified)** 1 year 10 months ago

I'm in my 70 and never had seaside petunias  
before. So thanks for the advice on how to  
grow and water them in a pot.

[REPLY](#)

**Jennifer Keating** 1 year 10 months ago

We are so happy to hear that our Petunia Growing Guide was useful! Hopefully, you have gorgeous petunias this summer.

[REPLY](#)

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**Lillie (not verified)** 2 years 9 months ago

Earlier this season I found a beautiful Black Petunia and it was just gorgeous! It bloomed and did well for a few weeks and then it just drooped and seems to be dying. I would love to know if there is some way I could revive it.

[REPLY](#)

**The Editors** 2 years 9 months ago

Your black petunia sounds like it had

— and that's the reason. Depending

ety of reasons, most often with either too much or too little water.

Petunias are rather drought and heat tolerant, and do best with a thorough watering once a week. The key is for good drainage because excessive water in the soil can cause the roots to be affected. They prefer slightly moist soil to dry soil, so check your soil to see where things stand before adding more moisture.

If your plant does not perk up when watered, stop watering it and allow the soil to dry thoroughly. Petunias also benefit from a dose of balanced fertilizer monthly.

Drooping can also be due to a lack of sun, as they prefer full sun, or a sign of insect or fungal issue.

**REPLY**

I was so relieved to come across Alicia's comment regarding withering petunias. She has described exactly what has happened with my petunias this year!! Exactly!! I have not been able to determine the cause of this problem either. Could there have something in the potting soil used at the greenhouse? I would really like to know the cause so as not to duplicate the problem next year. Nearby flowers don't seem to be negatively affected.

**REPLY**

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**Alicia Alicia McCord (not verified)** 3 years 11 months ago

I have successfully grown petunias for many years. I put them in pots on my front steps as well as in the flower beds on either side of the steps, all in full sun. Last year however, they failed miserably. I planted around 60 plants from six-packs over a 3-4 week period. Some died within a week of planting, some after a couple weeks, some after several weeks or even two months. All went through the same stages: one day the plant would look vigorous and

adequately moist; the third day the plant would be withered completely. One by one, the petunias went through these stages until I had only one that made it through most of the summer. This summer, after 4 weeks in the ground, the same thing is happening. I am losing plants daily. I can find no evidence of pests nor of gophers (though gophers would not be able to bother the potted plants). I have kept the soil moist but not wet. I thought that perhaps there was something wrong with my soil, but the petunias in pots with potting soil were/are dying just the same way as those in the soil. I'm completely baffled. As I said, I have successfully grown petunias for many years. I will appreciate any insight given. Thank you.

**REPLY**

**Heather Pens (not verified)** 11

months 4 weeks ago

My guess would be a fungus in the soil. I would guess the only thing to do would be to replace the soil and clean your tools. Ask someone that

REPLY

MORE COMMENTS

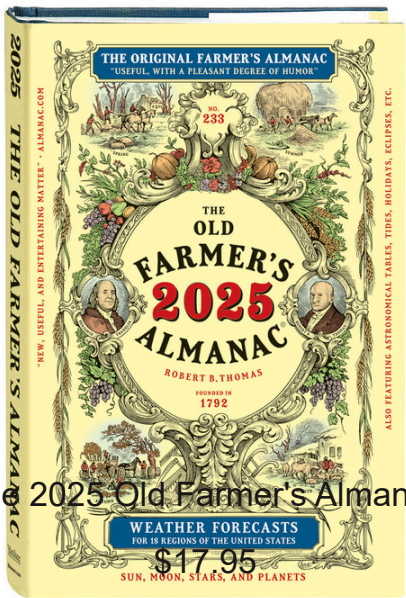
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