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# How to Grow Columbines: The Complete Columbine Flower Guide

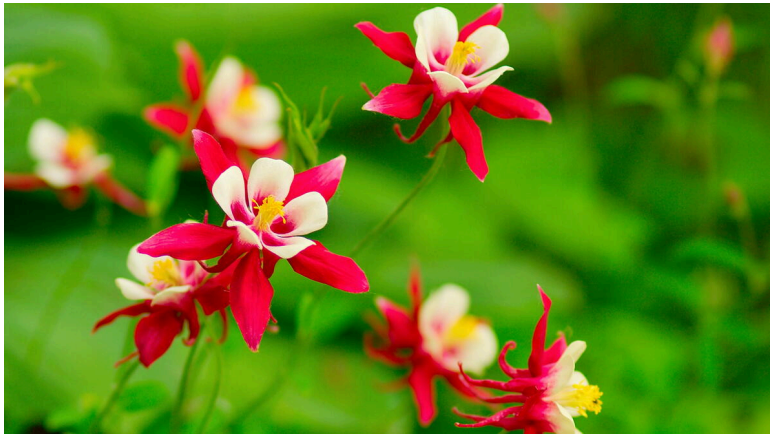


Photo Credit: Valentin Agapov/Shutterstock

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# Planting, Growing, and Caring for Columbines

By [Catherine Boeckmann](#)

Last Updated: January 31, 2025



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Have you seen this enchanting wild-  
flower? **Columbine** (*Aquilegia*), with its  
multi-colored petals, blooms from spring  
through early summer. Though this native  
perennial appears delicate, it's among the  
hardeniest of native plants and is deer-resis-

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# What is a Columbine Flower?

Columbine (*Aquilegia*), aka granny's bonnet, is a perennial flower that blooms in the spring. There are more than 70 species of columbines, including native columbines that grow wild in mountain areas, along stream beds, and in temperate woodlands. The deep-blue columbines that grow as wildflowers in the Colorado mountains are direct descendants of the earliest columbines.



*Blue Columbine wildflower growing on Aspen, Colorado, forest floor.  
Credit: Teri Virbickis/Shutterstock*

## What Does a Columbine Flower Look Like?

within five long backward-extending spurs. The petals are often bi-colored and may be bright red with pink, lavender, blue, yellow, white, or a combination of these colors! Columbines cross-pollinate easily, so new species form frequently. Their pretty blue-green, lacy foliage stays green long after the blossoms disappear, turning purple or red in the fall.

The flowers attract butterflies, bees, moths, and hummingbirds—but thank-fully, not deer! This hardy plant is also quite resilient and drought-tolerant. Once started, columbine propagates for years and, although perennial, increases most rapidly by self-seeding.

**See the video below to view this flower  
in many shades:**

...Old Farmer's Almanac - Aquilegia



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## PLANTING

Columbines grow well in the sun or light shade. Although these plants aren't picky about soil conditions, they do prefer well-draining soil of average fertility.

### When to Plant Columbine

- Direct-sow in the ground in the fall or after last spring's frost.

## How to Plant Columbine

- Press the seed into the soil, but do not cover it.
- Thin to the strongest plants.
- If setting a mature plant into a container, create a hole twice the diameter of the “old” pot. Set the top of the root ball level with the soil surface. Fill in with soil, then tamp gently and water.
- Outdoors space mature plants 1 to 2 feet apart, depending on the mature size of the variety. Water thoroughly.



## GROWING

- Avoid overwatering.
- Deadhead faded flowers. New buds

- Allow the plant to self-seed after it blooms, and it will produce many volunteer seedlings in the following year.
- Columbine dies back all the way to the ground at dormancy. Plants can be cut back hard in the fall to clean up the foliage.
- Before the ground freezes, mulch to protect the roots.

## Types

Among the more than 70 species of columbine, these are the favorites to cultivate:

- **Native eastern red columbine**  
(*Aquilegia canadensis*): pale, pink to blood-red and pink/yellow flowers that point upwards
- **‘Corbett’**: pale yellow flowers; resistant to leaf miners; dwarf variety, 1 to 1-1/2 feet tall
- **‘Little Lanterns’**: red and yellow bell-shape flowers; resistant to leaf miners; compact, 10 inches tall
- **‘William Guinness’ European**



The **Swan series** includes bicolor, midsize (16- to 22-inch) hybrids excellent for cutting when half open ...

- ‘Swan Pink and Yellow’: Soft pink outer petals with pastel yellow inner petals.
- ‘Swan Red and White’: Red outer petals with white inner petals.

## HARVESTING

Cut flowers for indoor arrangements when they are half open. Vase life is 5 to 7 days.

## GARDENING PRODUCTS



## PESTS/DISEASES

### *Columbine Pests and Diseases*

Pest/Disease	Type	Symptoms	Control/Prevention
<b>Leaf miners</b>	Insect	Meandering blisters in leaves caused by tunneling larvae	Remove infested leaves; weed around plants; use row covers; till soil early in season; rotate plantings
<b>Leaf spot (fungal)</b>	Fungus	Leaf spots on lower leaves enlarge and turn brown/black; fuzzy growth or pustules in lesions; disease progresses upward; leaves die	Destroy infected leaves/severely infected plants (do not compost); remove plant debris regularly; disinfect garden tools; choose resistant varieties; good air circulation; avoid overhead watering
<b><u>Powdery mildew</u></b>	Fungus	White spots or flourlike coating on upper leaf surfaces; leaves drop; distortion/stunting	Destroy infected parts (do not compost); remove plant debris regularly; resistant varieties; good air circulation/sunlight

Pest/Disease	Type	Symptoms	Control/Prevention
			soda/1 qt water; prevent plant stress; avoid overhead watering
<b>Root-knot nematodes</b>	Nematode	Roots “knotty” or galled; plants stunted/yellow/wilted/weakened; leaves and other parts may distort or die; poor flowering	Destroy infested plant debris after flowering season, including roots (do not compost); disinfect garden tools; choose resistant varieties; solarize soil; plant <a href="#">French marigolds</a> ( <i>Tagetes patula</i> ) as a trap crop; rotate plantings
<a href="#">Rust</a>	Fungus	Orange pustules on underside of lower leaves/stems; spots on upper leaf surfaces; foliage distorts/dies/drops; stunting; poor flowering; plants weakened	Destroy infected parts/severely diseased plants; remove plant debris regularly; disinfect tools; resistant varieties; good air circulation; avoid overhead watering; weed diligently
<b>Southern blight (white mold)</b>	Fungus	Leaves/stems/entire plants wilt, brown or blacken, and may die;	Destroy infected parts/plants, white

Pest/Disease	Type	Symptoms	Control/Prevention
		mustard-seed–like balls on stems’ bases/nearby soil	beyond plant and 8 inches deep; re-move plant debris regularly; disinfect garden tools; so-larize soil; resistant varieties; provide good drainage

WIT AND WISDOM

- Columbine’s Latin name, *Aquilegia*, is derived from the Latin word for eagle, *aquila*. The long spurs that extend behind the flower petals resemble the claws of an eagle.
- Native Americans traditionally used the crushed seeds as a love charm and for medicinal purposes.
- Columbine was named for the Latin word *columba*, which means dove.

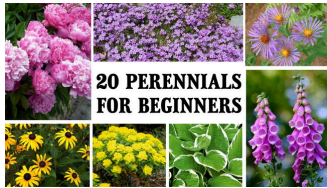
FLOWERS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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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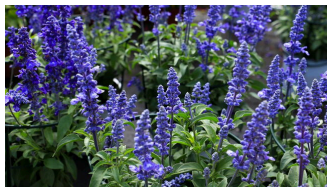
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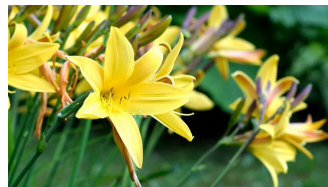
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## COMMENTS

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**Susan (not verified)** 9 months 2 weeks ago

Should you dead head the spent flowers on columbine plants?

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**The Editors** 9 months 2 weeks ago

Hello, Susan!

Yes, you should deadhead your columbine, it'll promote a longer blooming cycle!

As above in the growing guide:

**Deadhead faded flowers. New buds will develop along the stems. The bloom season can thus be extended by as long as 6 weeks into midsummer.**

—The Editors

**REPLY**

---

**Jessica Hansen (not verified)** 10 months ago

We are moving in a and I would like to take my columbine with me, what is the best way to go about potting the plant?

**The Editors** 9 months 3 weeks ago

Hi Jessica,

Columbines are not the easiest of plants to transplant/divide and it is best to attempt in the late summer/fall after all the flowers and foliage have faded or in the spring as new growth starts to emerge.

Columbines tend to have deep tap roots so if you must remove them from the current location, you need to dig a large circle around the base and deep enough to retain all of the roots. Failure to do so can cause your plant to suffer.

Given the fact you are moving and your window for removal may not align with the best times to transplant, you can certainly try to remove it from the ground and plant in a container with quality potting mix, but there is no guarantee it will survive.



REPLY

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**Jenny (not verified)** 1 year ago

I have the native columbines in my perennial beds here too the Piedmont of North Carolina and I dearly love them. They are so delightful to see blooming early in spring as they are a good stand alone flower needing no others to make them shine. I love how they reseed and send more and more volunteers each year. If you don't know columbine, you should!!

REPLY

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**Anne (not verified)** 1 year ago

Native eastern red columbine bloom in the woods here in Conn.; such a wonderful native plant~

REPLY

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**Denene (not verified)** 1 year 9 months ago

the ground by deer, repeatedly. I'm not sure why this site indicates that it is deer resistant - more like deer attractant. If you get one and have deer come into your yard, be sure to protect your columbine with some netting or something. It IS gorgeous, when not eaten to the ground.

**REPLY**

**Chuck (not verified)** 1 year 2 months ago

I think "Deer and rabbit Resistant" is a misnomer. A deer or rabbit will eat just about anything if they are hungry enough..

**REPLY**

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**Lorraine poznak (not verified)** 2 years 3 months ago

I truly love all the information you send out, the receipes, health issues and the quotes and fact findings, the garden issues with the pic-

the staff of the farmers almanac, THANK YOU,  
great job, I look forward to every issue.

**REPLY**

---

**Sharon Browder (not verified)** 2 years 11  
months ago

Columbine is Colorado state's flower. Avery  
beautiful, delicate blume. This year i chose to  
plant something that would be deer resistant  
and drought worthy.

I planted 16 adult plants in FULL BLOOM cost-  
ing almost \$200. Aling with a few other plants  
for a big splash of color. But mostly because  
they are deer resistant.

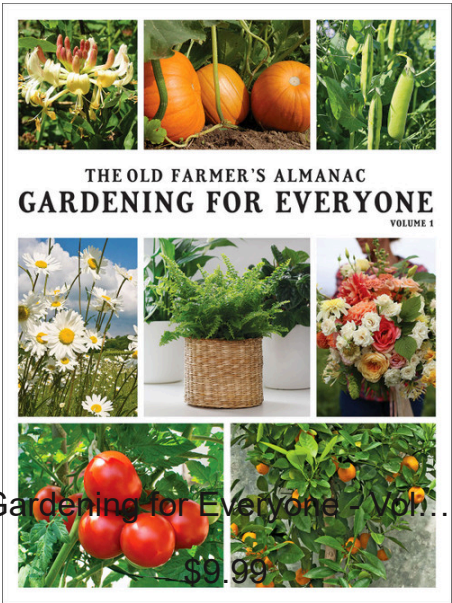
By morning EVERYone of these plants were  
eaten to the core if the plant.

These plants do not flower the entire summer  
so all I have is nubbs until next year.

Please don't believe everything you read.

**REPLY**

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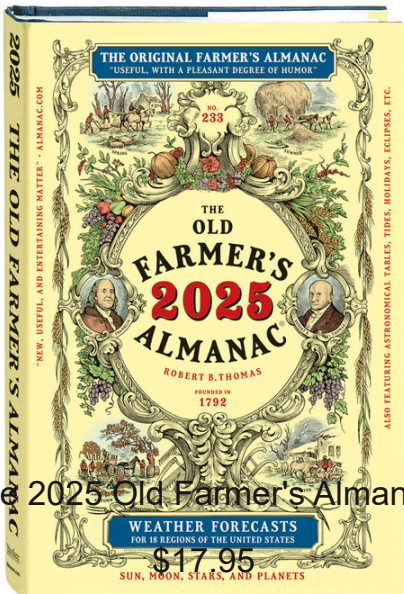
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