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# How to Grow Lisianthus: The Complete Guide



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# Planting, Growing, and Harvesting Lisianthus

By [Andy Wilcox](#)

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Growing this elegant cut flower will set your garden apart! With showy, rose-like blooms that are long-stemmed and come in a wide range of colors, these beauties are truly breathtaking. Learn how to plant, grow, and care for lovely lisianthus.

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## About Lisianthus

Lisianthus (*Eustoma grandiflorum*), also called prairie gentian, is a cut flower star for a good reason—they're gorgeous and have a long vase life! With multiple ruffled flowers in single or double blooms reminiscent of roses. They flower on long stems in colors ranging from white through pinks reds lilac blues and even

There are many lisianthus varieties available, organized into four groups based on when they bloom and what climate they need. Lisianthus are hardy in USDA zones 8 to 10. While they are perennials in their native range of the southwest US, they are usually grown as annuals.

If you follow flower farmers on social media, you'll see them holding huge armloads of lisianthus blooms or explaining why they no longer bother. The flowers can be challenging to start from seed. The extended time it takes for seedlings to be ready for transplant means lots of time for something to go wrong. You'll need your A-game, but that doesn't mean it can't be done!

However, home gardeners can grow from transplants or plugs if they can find them at nurseries or online retailers. Or, we'll show you how to start lisianthus from seed. For avid gardeners, it's worthwhile for such a breathtakingly beautiful flower.



A flower bed full of apricot lisianthus flowers. Credit: Kathy D. Reasor

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## PLANTING

Good drainage is necessary. Soil rich in organic matter is ideal, and a pH of 6.5 to 7.0 is the sweet spot. Amend beds with leaf litter, compost, and aged manure.

If your flower patch is short on room, don't despair; these flowers grow well in containers on the deck or patio.

## When to Plant Lisianthus

In most locations, you can transplant lisianthus into outdoor beds about 4 weeks before your last frost date.

If you are growing from seed, you can count backward from your transplant date —a long way back. Lisianthus can take 3 to 5 months to be ready to plant out. For most of us, start about 4 months before your transplant date.

Lisianthus likes cool weather to become established when transplanted and can

you'll want to cover them with frost cloth  
for the night unless covered in snow.

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## How to Start Lisianthus From Seed

Lisianthus seeds are tiny, so buying pelleted seeds can make them much easier to handle. Soil blocks work well, but lisianthus can also be planted in small cell trays.

- Pre-moisten your seed starting mix,

- Lisianthus seeds need light to germinate, so press them lightly to ensure good seed-to-soil contact and then apply a thin layer of vermiculite.
  - Keep the seed starting mix evenly moist (but not drippy wet) until germination, which can take two weeks. A humidity dome or plastic covering will help keep the moisture in.
  - After they sprout, remove the humidity dome and let the medium slightly dry out between waterings. Don't let them get too dry and wilt. With many potting mixes, the soil will change color a bit when dry, but I like to feel them to be certain. If they're dry to the touch or very lightweight, it's past time to water.
  - Fertilize weekly with a dilute solution. The small seedlings will be in their trays or soil blocks for months. Eventually, they will use up the available nutrients and stop growing without supplemental fertilizer.
  - Don't let the trays get too warm. If temps get high for a while, above 75-
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likely never flower.

Lisianthus will still be small when transplanted—probably only an inch tall. Ideally, they should have four sets of leaves.

- When transplanting, space the seedlings 4 to 5 inches apart and stake or net them when you plant.
- They'll need support by staking or using netting, and it's easier to do it right away than to forget and try to weave stems through the netting later. Their heads get heavy with the huge blooms, and they will likely flop.



Young lisianthus taken out of its nursery container to transplant into soil. Credit: Kathy D. Reasor

## GROWING

Lisianthus are drought tolerant once established and will continue to blossom for

- Lisianthus can develop water spots on their petals with overhead irrigation, so a drip irrigation setup is handy.

Flower farmers often grow lisianthus in hoop tunnels to protect their petals from the rain. But if you don't have such fancy equipment, you can still grow them!

- Mulch lisianthus to keep the soil shaded, help maintain moisture, and keep weeds down.

## Types

- ‘Rosanne Black Pearl’ is a dark, violet bloomer—think eggplant color. Combine it with lighter cream-colored flowers for a stunning bouquet or grow it as a strip of elegant border flowers in a bed.
- ‘Arena III Red’ is a deep pink with blooms that will fool anyone into thinking they are a rose.
- ‘Balboa Blue Rim’ are two-tone blooms: white centers and purple ruffled edges.
- ‘First Love’ is a blushing pink and white



Balboa Blue Rim Lisianthus:  
Gorgeous purple-rimmed white blossoms. Credit: nuwatphoto

## HARVESTING

- Lisianthus bloom from the bottom up, so the lowest blooms open first, like gladiola. They can be harvested any time after the lower blooms begin to open.
- Cut **deeply** to encourage future long stems.
- Strip off all foliage that will be in the vase.
- Fresh-cut lisianthus will last up to 15 days in the vase.

## GARDENING PRODUCTS



## PESTS/DISEASES

- Fusarium wilt
- Root pathogens as seedlings due to the long holding time before transplanting

## WIT AND WISDOM

- Because lisianthus is so time-consuming to start from seed, you may wish to purchase started plants or plugs. Let someone else do the hard part.
- Temperature is important when growing lisianthus, especially during the

them cooler, about 50–65°F. Some varieties may rosette at room temps.

## FLOWERS

## 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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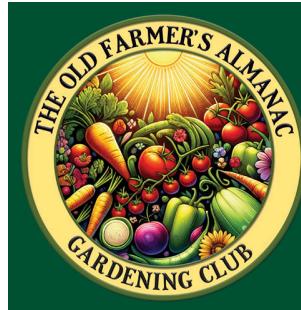
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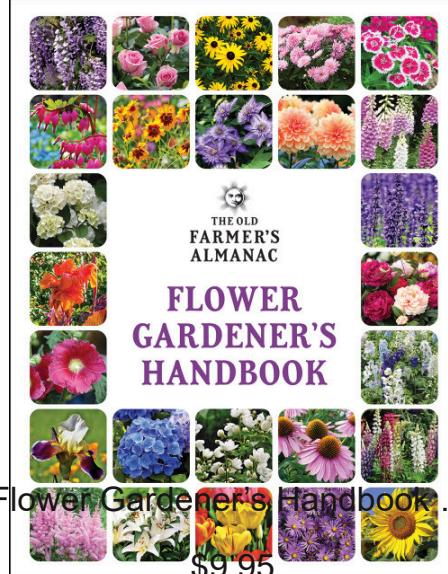
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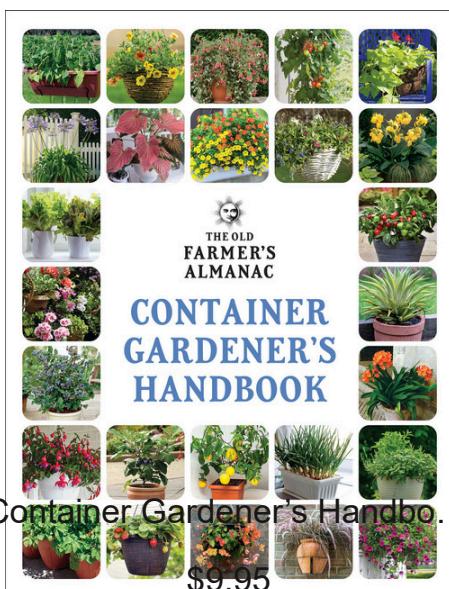
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