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# How to Grow Bleeding Hearts: The Complete Bleeding Heart Flower Guide



Botanical Name:  
*Dicentra spectabilis*

Plant Type: Flower

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# Planting, Growing, and Caring for Bleeding Hearts

By [Catherine Boeckmann](#)

Last Updated: April 10, 2025



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The old-fashioned “bleeding heart” flower has long been a favorite perennial of the shady flower garden. This hardy plant blooms prolifically in early spring and finishes its growing cycle when warm weather sets in. Learn when to plant bleeding heart, how to care for it, and other tips in our growing guide.

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**Almanac Planting Guide**

Once called the finest hardy plant of the 19th century, bleeding hearts soon became as “common as a wallpaper pattern.” Today, this perennial is in favor because it is easy to grow, and nothing surpasses its attention-getting form: graceful arching, 3-foot stems adorned with dangling pink, red, or white flower hearts. The hearts appear to be dripping (hence its most common name).

Blooming in the spring, bleeding heart will grow up to 2 feet high and up to 30 inches wide. It finishes its growing cycle when warm weather sets in. The flowers fade, the leaves die back, and the plant goes dormant in late spring or early summer.

Bleeding Hearts are woodland plants, so they enjoy the partial shade of spring-flowering trees such as dogwoods and serviceberries. They won't flower in deep shade. Near the house, mix with [hostas](#) and lamium for texture.

## ADVERTISEMENT

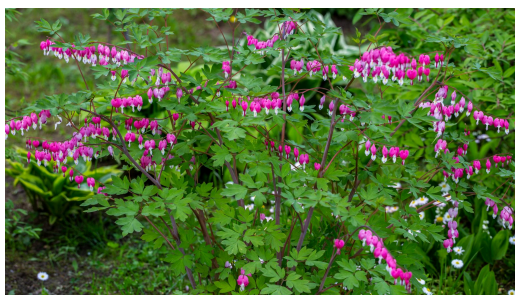


Photo: S.O.E./Shutterstock

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## PLANTING

Bleeding heart is hardy in Zones 2 to 9.  
Choose a site with part sun or light shade.  
The soil must be fertile like their wood-  
land environment; add organic matter

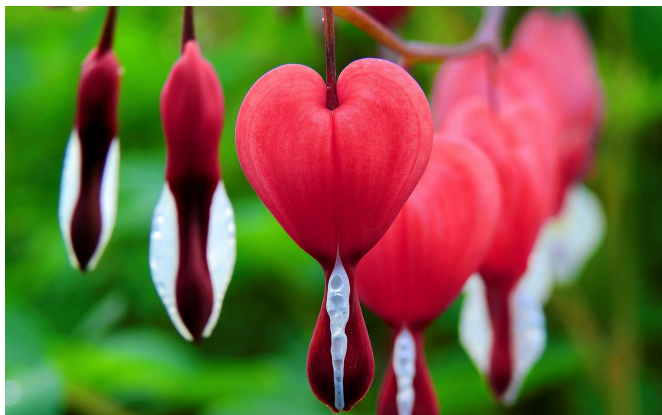
compost. Ensure soil is well-draining but generally moist, never dried out.

## When to Plant Bleeding Heart

- Plant tubers in spring after the threat of frost has passed or in the early fall. ([See local frost dates.](#))

## How to Plant Bleeding Heart

- Space old-fashioned bleeding hearts about 24 inches apart.
- Loosen the soil to 1 foot deep, mix in organic matter, and plant [tubers](#) about an inch below the surface; backfill and firm soil.
- Water to soak the soil after planting.
- Spread mulch (such as decayed leaves) around the plant to keep moisture in and weeds out.



## GROWING

- In spring, apply a thin layer of compost, followed by mulch, to help retain moisture (and deter weeds). Soil rich with organic matter is all the fertilizer this plant needs.
- Keep soil moist, but not soggy. If you plant is new, we would suggest watering weekly during the first season. But once established, only water if rainfall is less than 1 inch per week.
- Deadheading faded flowers can prolong bloom of some varieties.
- When the plant goes dormant, you may cut back the leaves and stems when they begin to yellow and wither away. Leave 1 inch of the stalk to protect the crown during the winter months.
- Bleeding heart does not like being moved. It will thrive for years without being divided or replanted. If transplanting is necessary, do it as soon as the first leaves poke out of the soil in early spring.

cuttings in autumn. Bleeding heart also self-sows prodigiously.

- Plant shade-loving annuals like begonias or impatiens in the garden space where the bleeding heart grew.
- Mix in shade-loving perennials that bloom in mid- to late summer to fill the space as bleeding heart goes dormant. Hostas and coral bells are examples.

## Types

There are more than 20 species of *Dicentra*. Many new hybrids have been developed to increase heat tolerance and vigor.

- *Dicentra spectabilis* ‘**Gold Heart**’: chartreuse foliage
- *D. spectabilis* ‘**Alba**’: white flowers
- *D. spectabilis* ‘**Valentine**’: white-tip cherry-red blooms on burgundy stems
- *D. eximia* ‘**Zestful**’: native to North America; “fringed” (fern-leaf) foliage, with pale pink flowers; 12-18 inches tall
- *D. eximia* ‘**Wind of Hearts**’: small, four



- *D. eximia* ‘**Aurora**’: small, fern-leaf foliage, with white blooms
- *D. cucullaria* (aka “Dutchman breeches”): native to North America; fragrant, yellow-tip white flowers resembling pantaloons; 4 to 12 inches tall



*The delicate pantaloon-shape blooms of Dutchman's Breeches.*

*Credit: Mike Truchon/Shutterstock*

## HARVESTING

Entire stems of bleeding heart can be used as cut flowers. Vase life is up to 2 weeks.

The bleeding heart is lovely as a pressed flower. Pick flowers early in the morning after the dew has dried. Put them between two sheets of paper and place this bundle between the pages of a thick book.

After a couple of weeks you'll have per-

fect flat, papery hearts. [See how to press flowers.](#)

## GARDENING PRODUCTS



## PESTS/DISEASES

- Bleeding heart is resistant to deer and rabbits.
- Diseases: aster yellows; southern blight; fungal leaf spot; [powdery mildew](#); Fusarium wilt; Verticillium wilt.
- Pest: [aphids](#)



## WIT AND WISDOM

- This early-spring bloomer is also known as lady's locket, lady's heart, and lyre flower.
- *Dicentra spectabilis* is native to north-eastern China, Japan, and Korea.

[See more plants that thrive in the shade!](#)

**FLOWERS**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

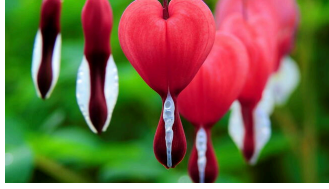
### Catherine Boeckmann



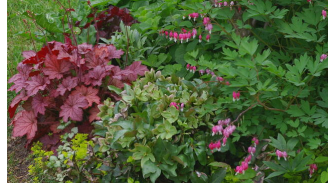
Catherine Boeckmann loves nature, stargazing, and gardening so it's not surprising that she and The Old Farmer's Almanac found

in the state of Indiana. [Read More](#)  
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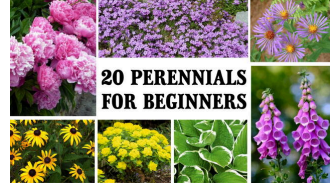
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## COMMENTS

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**Dani (not verified)** 1 week 1 day ago

I've been reading up on bleeding hearts and got two plants I'm going to plant after frost, and bought some blue bleeding heart seeds that I am going to try to start. However, while reading, I learned that bleeding hearts are toxic, particularly to dogs, and also to humans, and perhaps other small animals (I am particularly worried about skin irritation to humans and neural toxicity to small dogs). I decided to wear

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though he's never showed an interest in them, only eating grass in the spring. Do you have any suggestions for keeping small animals away from the plants? My plants will be in the front yard where there is not a fence and my dog never goes there unattended. I would just hate to cause any problems for animals if they might be attracted. Thank you.

**REPLY**

**The Editors** 1 week 1 day ago

Hi Dani,

Yes, bleeding hearts are toxic to dogs (and other animals) as well as can cause skin irritation for humans.

While it sounds like your dog may not be interested in your new plants, it is certainly a reason to pause. You could try to fence them in, although that may take away from the aesthetic of them.

You can make sure to keep him away

just in case he gets loose or someone else is caring for him. It also won't prevent other animals who are curious.

If you are really concerned, it might be best to avoid planting them altogether. We know they are beautiful plants, but it is important to do all we can to take care of our furry friends.

**REPLY**

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**Valerie Detrojan (not verified)** 11 months 2 weeks ago

I planted a bleeding heart 3 yrs ago. First year did great. Next two years it starts to grow. Think it might do something. Next day something got at it right down to soil level. Not sure what is eating it. Not sure if there is enough stem left. Thought I would try to cage it

**REPLY**



I have a bleeding heart vine, I was wondering if you know of any good articles or something that you could possibly email me. It was given to me about 3 yrs ago as baby but only really watered it until this last year, when I realized that I just might have a lime green thumb. Got from fiance's mom, she has hers inside so that's where mine is. I live in NW Washington.

**REPLY**

---

**Joanne (not verified)** 1 year 11 months ago

I had a Bleeding Heart for at least ten years. Big and Beautiful. Then several years ago it never came back. In the same area I have Lily of the Valley. Do you think the Lilies crowded it out? Thank you

**REPLY**

**The Editors** 1 year 11 months ago

Hi Joanne,

While lily of the valley is a beautiful



zomes will quickly take over an area if left unattended and will choke out weeds and other plants in its vicinity. It appears this is unfortunately what happened to your bleeding heart. You can attempt to dig up the rhizomes in that area of your property if there are any other plants near by you want to protect, but remember if any rhizomes remain, the plant will continue to spread each year.

It is often best to plant lily of the valley in an area where it can live on its own and prevent it from negatively affecting other plants.

**REPLY**

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**Cherry-Ann Morton (not verified)** 2 years 1 month ago

I leave the flowers to go to seed. This is the easiest way to increase and replenish these easy and beautiful plants. You can collect the seeds when ripe and sprinkle throughout your property

I especially like the white variety and yes, they make lovely indoor, long lasting vase flowers.

**REPLY**

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**Jackie Thacker (not verified)** 4 years 10 months ago

Bleeding heart beautiful. I am 64 never seen this before. Where can I buy one. I live in Kentucky.

**REPLY**

**geraldine (not verified)** 2 years 1 month ago

available in walmart

**REPLY**

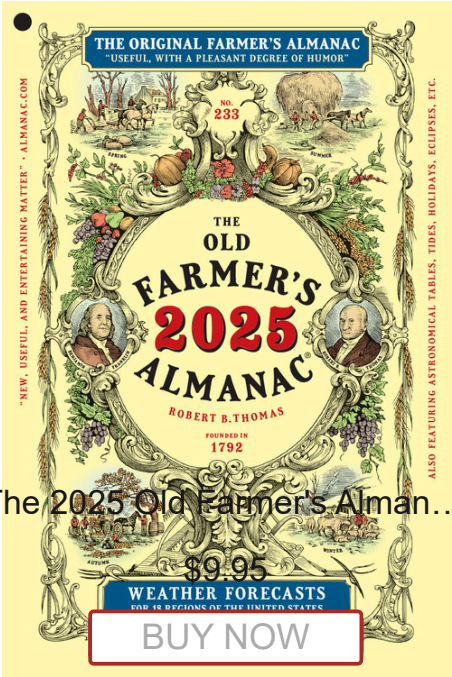
**The Editors** 4 years 10 months ago

Bleeding heart blooms in very early spring, so you'll often find at nurseries or garden centers at that time of the year!

REPLY

MORE COMMENTS

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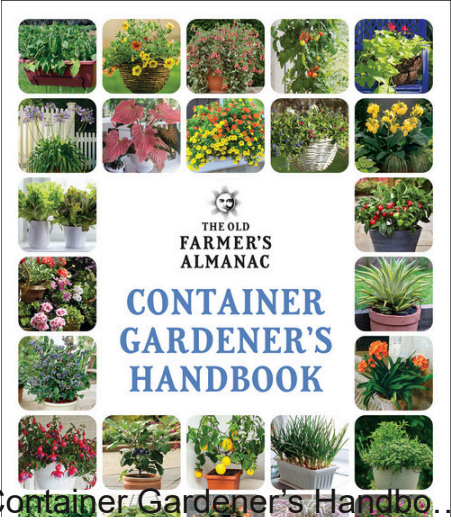
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