

Garden Plant of the Month for April 2018: Petunia

The Petunia: easy care, lots of choice

With its large trumpets the Petunia proclaims in all directions that spring really has sprung. This colourful summer annual has diverse uses: in hanging baskets, containers, sacks on the wall and troughs. And when it's planted in a bed, the Petunia likes to shine amongst the groundcover in borders. It has staying power: if looked after properly, the Petunia will flower until the frosts arrive and will create a sea of flowers in the garden for all that time.

Range

Plain, spotted, striped, with single or double flowers, and that profusion of beauty in all the colours of the rainbow through to almost black - the choice of petunias is overwhelming, although they sometimes bear a different name. Well-known series such as Surfinia, Crazytunia or Cascadia hint at their specialism with their name: long stems, unusual flower shapes or a cloud of hanging flowers.

Petunia trivia

- The plant is related to Nicotiana, the tobacco plant.
- The Petunia was given its name in 1789 by French botanist Antoine Laurent de Jussieu (1748-1836). He drew his inspiration from what he knew: at the time, 'pétun' was the local word for tobacco.
- Artist Georgia O'Keeffe made her breakthrough in 1925 with a Petunia painting. She had planted purple and blue petunias next to her summer home on Lake George, and adored them so much that she recorded the flowers in sensual close-ups that became a sensation.
- Bees love the Petunia's nectar, so that the plant brings lots of activity to the garden.

Origin

The Petunia originates from South America, where the plant grows in Brazil and Argentina. In the wild the plants often look much more rangy than the profusion of flowers that growers have managed to produce through crossbreeding. There are hundreds of hybrids available, and breeders keep producing new cultivars with new colours or shapes or which are - for example - better able to cope with rain.

What to look for when buying

- Generally speaking, the larger the plant you buy, the greater the chance that it will be a successful bloomer.
- It's particularly important for Petunias offered in very small pot sizes to check that the plant is rooted and shows signs of growth. These small plants are usually grown from seed, the larger ones from cuttings.
- It's important to keep the soil damp in order to prevent drooping.
- Remove yellowed leaves and wilted flowers from plants that have been on the shopfloor for a while, and ensure sufficient light in order to avoid stretching.
- As with all summer annuals, the earlier the Petunia finds a home for the summer, the better.

Sales and display tips

The Petunia is popular with garden lovers who specifically buy by colour and like to make their own arrangements in containers or hanging baskets. But the enormous profusion of flowers means it's also a classic impulse buy, particularly if it is presented ready-made in a container, decorative bucket or basket. Display the loose specimens alongside containers with a reservoir which relieve the customer of effort. Don't hang Petunia baskets too high (this often means that only the plastic container is visible), but from a rack in layers so that customers are mainly looking down on them. And present them mixed: a large table in one colour is more of the same, whilst a mixed table of petunias is an instant garden party.

Care tips for consumers

- Petunias like to be out of the wind in full sun.
- Keep the soil moist, water every day on sunny days, ensure drainage in pots and hanging baskets so that the roots don't get too wet.
- Be sparing with plant food: it particularly encourages the production of leaves and not necessarily of flowers.
- Cut off wilted flowers stem and all.
- If the Petunia is past its peak, prune it back and the flowers will return in full.

Garden Plant of the Month

The Petunia is the Garden Plant for April 2018. The 'Garden Plant of the Month' is an initiative from the Flower Council of Holland. Every month the Flower Council works with representatives of the floriculture sector to choose a plant with an amazing look or unusual characteristics to put in the spotlight. Sometimes it will be a green star that's highlighted, and sometimes an undiscovered treasure that deserves to be better known and merits a place in the garden, on the patio or on the balcony. Because everyone is happier with more plants.

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[Thejoyofplants.co.uk](#) is an initiative from the Flower Council of Holland to help consumers discover that you feel better with plants around you.

Photo caption

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