

Yeovil Allotments Association

Birth Flowers for

November

Chrysanthemum & Peony

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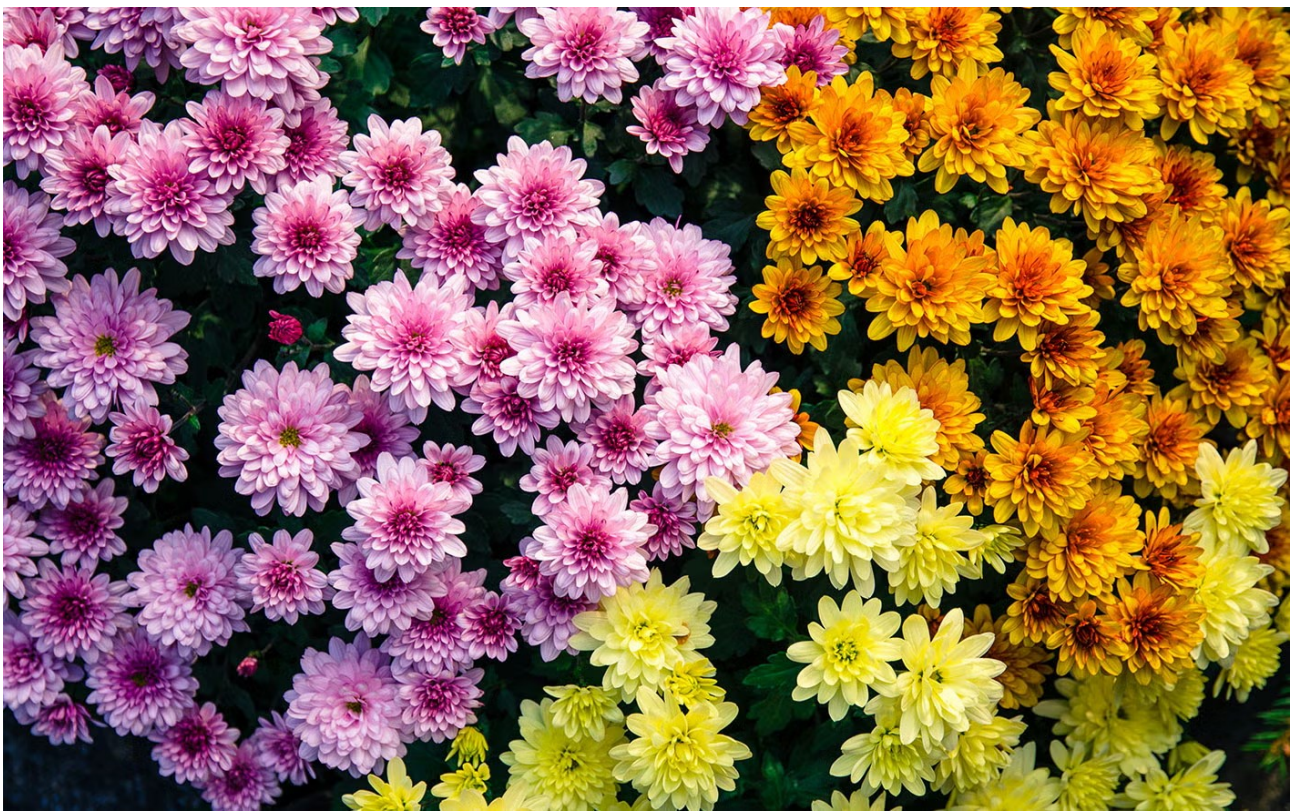
by

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## Chrysanthemum

How to plant, grow, and care for chrysanthemums – for beautiful autumn flowers

Everything you need to know about cultivating these glorious blooms



Even if you **don't have a huge garden**, there's one autumn plant you absolutely need: chrysanthemums.

These easy-to-grow flowers are the calling cards of autumn and can be planted after the **last frost** – so from mid May onwards.

Chrysanthemums, also sometimes affectionately called 'mums', are **pest** and disease-resistant, so they're about as **low-maintenance** as it gets. They work well in pots and in garden beds, too, and come in many different forms with big, lush flowers or **daisy-like blooms**.

They're technically perennials so (if you can) get them in the ground early in the season, so that they can establish their root systems before the colder months hit. But if not, no worries. They're inexpensive enough to treat as annuals, so you can replant new chrysanthemums next year.

Because they come in every colour of the rainbow, they're a must-have for your autumn garden.

Nothing says 'welcome' to autumn like these bright, cheery fall flowers – so it's time to start planting now....

Growing tips



Here's what you need to know to grow them:

- **Exposure:** Full sun
- **When to plant:** Spring to late summer
- **Pests and diseases to watch out for:** Aphids, leaf miners, leaf spot

## How to plant chrysanthemums

Dig a hole twice as wide as the pot, and place the plant in the hole so that the crown (where the roots meet the stems) are at ground level – and not any deeper. Backfill the soil, water, and **mulch** to retain moisture and keep down weeds.

## How to care for chrysanthemums

Chrysanthemums are not big feeders, so add a compost when you plant them, then give them a general-purpose slow-release fertiliser in early summer. Water regularly, especially when you're first planting, or they'll wilt on hot days.

To encourage a bushier plant with more flowers, pinch off the tips of each "branch" anytime from late spring to early July. Do this a few times a season, but not any later than mid-July or you'll cut off the flower buds. If you're not into all that effort, it's fine to let them grow into a more free-form shape. Either way, don't expect pinching to produce that perfectly rounded plant you first brought home from the nursery; those are treated with growth regulators to produce a mounded shape.

If you're keeping them in pots or containers for the season, make sure to water during hot, dry spells. **Pots dry out much**

**faster** than garden beds, so check them regularly so they don't wilt.

### Common questions

Are chrysanthemums perennial?

Yes, chrysanthemums are **perennials**, which means they do come back every year. If you plant them in spring or early summer, the plants have time to settle in and will return in subsequent seasons. But here's the trick: most people plant them in autumn, which is too late in the year to get them established in time to survive the winter. However, nature is surprising, so sometimes, even if you plant late, they'll return next spring.

How do you divide fall chrysanthemums?

If your plants are getting floppy or too crowded with your other perennials, use a hand trowel or spade to separate a piece of the plant with the roots, to replant elsewhere. Do this in early spring when you first see new growth.

Should you cut off the dead flowers to help them bloom longer?

No, this isn't necessary and won't create new flowers. Spend your time doing something else fun in the garden.

Can you grow autumn chrysanthemums indoors?



Chrysanthemums need cold to initiate their flower buds, so you can't bring them indoors like a houseplant. However, you can buy florist chrysanthemums, which are grown in greenhouses and given as gift plants, much of the year.

Do fall chrysanthemums need full sun?

Yes. They need full sun, which is six or more hours per day. They can adapt to a little bit of shade, but they won't bloom well. If

they start to get too shaded by maturing trees, dig them up and move them in the spring.

## Peony

### How To Plant a Peony Step-by-Step (& The Big Mistake To Avoid)



1.

When is the best time to plant my peonies?

As with most perennials, we can plant peonies either in the fall or in spring.

There is a difference in what we have available in either season though.

If we're planting peonies in the fall, what we'll usually find in store or with online suppliers are bare roots. This means that we're planting

dormant peony root stocks that will overwinter in the ground and emerge the following spring.



When we're planting peonies in spring, they're usually only available as a potted plant. In early spring and late winter, you might be able to find bare rhizomes for sale; but later than that the roots will be taken off the shelf because they would already start to break dormancy.

### **Which choice is better?**

I don't think it's a question of better, but ***it is*** a question of timing. In the first couple of years, we have to focus on strong root development, not on flowering.

What is the best time to get the roots in the ground?



In spring, potted

peonies are more common in garden stores. If you're planting in the fall, the best time is several weeks before a hard freeze. This will allow the roots to recover and adjust to their new environment.

In spring, the best time is once the ground is sufficiently warm. This will depend on your gardening zone, of course. In my area, that usually happens anytime between mid-March and mid-April.

### **Let me take you along while I plant my peonies this spring.**

I have a few tips that might prove helpful to get these gorgeous perennials off to a good start.

But before we move on to getting the peonies in the ground, here's what you should take into account first.

### **Peonies NEED full sun in order to thrive!**

I'm afraid there's no workaround for this requirement. If we want our peonies to bloom and not just limp along, they NEED to be in full sun. This translates to about six hours of sun a day.



If you are in a gardening zone that gets scorching sun in

the afternoon (such as zones 8 and 9), then some afternoon shade may be good for peonies. But only in this scenario.

### **Peonies NEED well-draining soil in order to thrive!**

Of course, the downside of the full sun requirement is that we also have to make sure that the soil doesn't dry up too quickly, which is so often the case with portions of the garden that get this much direct sunlight.

And the kicker is that we have to strike the balance between not too dry, but well-draining enough. If there are pools and puddles lingering around after it rains, or after we water the plants, that's not good either. It may lead to root rot and fungal problems for the peonies.



Peonies need **consistent** moisture, but not **constant** moisture. So we have to water them regularly, but avoid overwatering them.

That's why I like to take care of the health of my soil year round. So in spring, I add a layer of compost to boost the nutrients in the soil and also improve its water-holding properties. I also add extra compost to the planting site every single time I get a new perennial in the ground.

Now that you know when and where to plant your peonies, let's go out in the garden and put some in the ground.

I'm planting my peonies in spring. But if you're doing this in the fall, I've also added some information on that at the end of the article.

### **Step 1: Prepare your peony planting site.**

I take this step very seriously because peonies are expensive plants. They won't bankrupt me, but compared to other perennials at the garden center, they seem to command quite a high price for such young plants.

So even though it may seem like an extra step – and an extra expense – I always try to do whatever I can to give them a boost right at planting time.



I've started adding a scoop of mycorrhizae right before I get my perennials in the ground. I like to refer to it as “gardener’s magic dust” because it works out of sight to boost the strength of the roots and thus the size and longevity of the plant.

I bought my mycorrhizae at a local garden center, but [this brand seems to be the most reputable and popular](#) based on reviews.

You can [read more about how this stuff helps your plants at planting time here](#).

The mycorrhizal fungi create a symbiotic relationship with the plant, a relationship that improves nutrient uptake, soil structure and the plant’s resilience against pests as well as environmental stressors.

This is really potent stuff, so I only use a small scoop of it for every plant, according to the instructions on the bag.



One small scoop per plant is enough to start creating fungal connections that nourish the soil.

By my calculations, it costs less than a dollar to add a sprinkling of mycorrhizae every time I plant a new perennial. The average price for a peony is around 35 dollars, with some cultivars going for as much as 79 dollars. I think the one dollar investment is definitely worth it!

I make sure to mix it around in the soil evenly. This is also when I add some extra compost or leaf mold to improve drainage.

## One mistake when planting peonies...

Speaking of protecting our “investment,” let’s avoid this one mistake that could set back our peonies. Namely, planting them too deeply.



We should never plant them deeper than they are in the nursery

pot.

We need to plant them at the same depth as they have been planted in their nursery pot. That means roots underground, crown right at ground level, the entirety of the stem above ground.

(You’ll see that the same is true when planting bare root peonies, if you read till the end.)

But look how tall  
the nursery pot  
is!



When I picked up this potted peony at the store, I thought there's no way it's planted that deeply. The nursery pot seemed way too tall for a peony. I don't know whether they use such large pots for ease of shipping or if it was just a marketing decision to accommodate the oversized label sleeve.

## **Step 2: Get your peony in the ground.**

It turned out that my suspicion was correct. The bottom third of the nursery pot was just extra potting soil. I think they used such a large container because the rhizomes were quite large and jammed in.



Honestly, the hardest part of this planting project was getting the peony rhizomes out of the pot. I didn't want to pull hard on the stems because they are quite tender and breakable. And since it's fresh growth, they're also full of water and would have snapped like celery stalks.



This was the most nerve-wracking part.

So I had to dig around the edges of the pot and pull out the peonies by the crown.

I got a bit nervous, but look how gorgeous these rhizomes were. So healthy and sturdy. I definitely made the right choice with this cultivar called 'Longlife Red.'

Adjusting the rhizomes and getting them in the ground was a bit tricky because the stems had been growing a bit lopsided in the nursery pot.



There were five attached rhizomes in the pot.

But that's perfectly normal and it will correct itself over the first growing season as the plant fills up and leans towards the sun.

**The essential rule: Don't bury the peony crown.**

I could have been tempted to bury the rhizomes deeper and use soil to prop them up a bit and make them look upright. But that would have been a mistake.



In the ground they go.

It's essential that we always transplant peonies at the same depth as they were planted in the nursery pot.

**The crown needs to be at ground level once you're done with planting. No roots exposed. No stems buried.**

I then backfilled the planting hole with the remaining potting soil from the nursery pot, and extra compost from my own compost bins.



Backfill, water, then top up the soil some more.

Step 3: Water, stake and mulch the peony plant.

I finished by watering everything really well (avoiding watering the leaves and just focusing on deep-watering the roots). Then I topped up the soil again, just because the water had settled it a bit too low and I was afraid it would go even lower after a heavy rain.



Peonies need lots of water to get established.

Staking is an extra step that I wouldn't usually bother with when I'm planting perennials. But when planting peonies, staking right from the get-go is important. Especially for a baby peony as tall as the one I've just planted.

First of all, because it's tender and I wouldn't want it to sway in a windstorm and snap. And secondly, because peonies produce really large blooms. The flowers often get too heavy for the stalks, so they will need staking later in the season anyway.



Adding a circular stake now to keep them upright.

I will raise it as the peonies grow taller.

I'm using a circular support for corralling the peonies. This will keep them upright, yet keep them loose enough to allow for air flow. It may look a bit silly now, but it will fill up over the rest of the growing season. This cultivar is fairly compact, so even though I might need to go up a size in circular stakes, this setup should be enough for the next couple of months.

As usual, I'm finishing up the transplanting process by applying a bit of mulch around the perimeter of the plant. You can use wood chips, dry leaves, leaf mold or fresh compost.



Happy campers soaking  
the sun about a week  
later.

Is the process the same when I plant bare root peonies?

That's right. Most of the steps are exactly the same whether you're planting potted peonies or bare root ones. You have to prepare the soil just as well and always pay attention to how much sun the plant will get.



Follow the same steps when you're planting bare root peonies.  
Make sure the "eyes" are facing up.

When you're planting bare roots, you'll want to make sure that you're getting them in the ground the right side up, with the "eyes" facing up. Then cover up everything and give it a good soak.

The only slight difference is that there's a bit more urgency to get bare roots in the ground. You'll have to plant them as soon as you get them, because the rhizomes are prone to drying faster if we leave them out of the ground for too long.

