

Poppy (*Papaver*)



Blousy blooms with colourful, almost paper-like, petals are the hallmarks of many true poppies – particularly the perennial Oriental poppy – *Papaver orientale*. These flowers, swaying in the breeze, are the very essence of the British summer.

Most poppies also produce ornamental ‘pepper pot’ seed heads, which can be cut and used for indoor decorations.

There are several types of poppy, from the annual *Papaver rhoeas*, called the field poppy, corn poppy or Flanders poppy, and which includes a specific type called Shirley poppies, to those large-flowered, perennial Oriental poppies. The wild corn poppy brings a bright splash of red to fields, but it looks great in gardens too. It is perfect for providing colour in a sunny situation where little else will grow, and for creating cottage gardens and is excellent for attracting bees and other pollinating insects.

Poppies will grow well in either a sunny or partially shaded position. Annual and biennial poppies will grow in a wide range of soils, including very poor and even stony ones, where little else grows well. The perennial, Oriental poppies prefer deep, fertile, well-drained soils.

Poppy varieties

- *Papaver rhoeas*, the field poppy, is a hardy annual, growing up to 40cm (16in) high and flowering from June into September. It is used as a modern-day symbol of hope every autumn and especially on Remembrance Sunday.
- *Papaver somniferum*, the opium poppy, is also a hardy annual, growing to 60cm (2ft) high and flowering throughout summer. Cultivated varieties are safe to grow in the garden as they don't produce opium!

Sowing poppies

The hardy annuals are incredibly easy to grow, as you can sow them directly outside where you want them to flower. Sowing time is usually from late March to mid-May. You can also sow in August and September to give plants that will flower earlier the following year.

If the seed heads are left on some plants after flowering, they will self-seed for future years.

