

GROWING GERBERAS

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Gerberas are profitable, long lasting and colorful flowers. A recent surge in popularity has resulted from several factors.

1. The increasing availability and advertisement of gerberas as cut flowers from the Netherlands.
2. The promotional activities of major seed companies introducing new flowering strains for use as potted and bedding plants.
3. The adoption of new selections from Florida breeders and their rapid clonal multiplication by tissue culture techniques.

The gerbera or Transvaal Daisy (Gerbera jamesonii) is a tropical perennial. The flowers are very showy in varying tints of yellow, orange, red, pink and white. Many hybrid gerberas have been developed, grown and evaluated in Florida. Cultivars have been selected for cut flower production or for pot plants.

CULTURE

Contrary to common belief, gerberas are not a difficult crop to grow. The plants are propagated by seeds or divisions. Division assures trueness to type and is the method generally used by most growers. Plant divisions can be potted in 4" to 5" pots or benched using a soil medium that provides good aeration and excellent drainage. Ground beds are more satisfactory than raised benches unless a depth of 10-12 inches is provided. The plants should be set 12 to 15 inches apart with the crowns well above the surface of the soil.

Based on a soil test, superphosphate, dolomitic limestone and some background nutrition should be incorporated. A soil pH within the range of 6.0 to 6.5 is desirable. Since gerberas are sensitive to water stress, maintain uniform moisture. Hybrid gerberas are heavy feeders and growth and flower production is greater when plants are well fertilized.

Gerberas grow best at a night temperature of 65°F but grow well and slower at lower temperatures. During the winter they are sometimes grown as cold as 50°. During the summer, a light intensity of 4 to 5,000 footcandles is recommended. Clumps may be divided in June and benched directly or grown in pots and benched or planted in larger containers in the fall. Production may continue for more than a year. When the clumps become crowded, division is necessary.

Propagation from seed is not simple. Seed is expensive and does not always germinate well. If a germinating facility with controlled temperature and light is not available, it may be advantageous to buy seedlings. Seedlings require warm temperatures, above 62°. They may begin to flower three months after benching. Flowers may not be of uniform quality from seed and inferior plants should be discarded when dividing.

Clonal propagation (tissue culture) produces uniform, high quality plants. Plants in 2/4's may flower beginning in two or three months.

Buds are generally visible in the crown 30 days before harvest.

Gerberas do not flower uniformly throughout the year. Production is greater when nights are cool and short and decreases during the summer when nights are long and warm.

Ring culture is especially appropriate for gerberas. A ring is made of plastic-lined hardware cloth about 4-5" tall and 7-8" across. It is placed on the soil in a bench and filled with soil. The gerbera is planted into this ring with the crown placed high. It is watered in but never again watered from the top. This keeps the crown relatively dry and elevates the leaves from the surrounding soil.

Gerberas are grown as bedding plants in southern areas. In the north, they are grown principally as cut flowers. Production may not exceed 20 flowers per square foot per year. But since they command a premium price, they may be profitable.

INSECT AND DISEASE CONTROL

Stem rot--Pythium, Phytophthora (controlled by Lesan or Truban or Banrot), Phizoctonia (controlled by Benlate or Banrot) and Verticillium all attach gerbera.

Leafminer--control with Diasinon, 25 EC, Permethrin, or Temik.

Aphids--control with Malathion, Dithio, Enstar or Temik

Spider Mites--control with Aramite 15 WP, Kelthane 35 WP, Pentac 50 WP, Tedion-dithio smoke or Temik.

Mildew, botrytis and alternaria leaf spot may require the use of fungicides. Good sanitation should reduce all of the above problems.

LITERATURE CITED

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