

Oriental
poppy

It's the perfect time to plant pretty poppies, and Geoffrey Burnie says there's at least one poppy variety to suit gardens in most parts of Australia.

With so many different types in so many different colours and sizes, there's a lot to love about these beautiful, easy-to-grow flowers. But if you want them for this winter and spring, you'll need to plant them this month. Poppies aren't one plant, they're a big family of different types at least six of which are well-known to gardeners. If you already know, grow and love one kind of poppy, the chances are you'll fall for the others too.

ANNUALS & PERENNIALS

Annual poppies are those that grow for one season. They bloom and die, all within a few months. That's why they are called annuals – they live their lives within a year. Iceland poppies, Californian poppies and Flanders poppies are all annual poppies.

Perennial poppies are those which live for more than two years but don't develop a permanent woody stem or branches. Many perennials die back to ground level for a period each year, usually winter, bursting back into life in spring. The oriental poppy is the best-known perennial poppy.

cheerful poppies

growing tips All poppies like plenty of sun, the more the better. Though good, fertile soil is always appreciated, as long as it doesn't stay wet and soggy, the soil most gardeners have is usually fine for poppies. They're not very hard plants to grow. In fact some, such as Californian poppies, are a little too easy, coming up generously the following year from their own seed.



Californian poppy

(*Eschscholzia californica*)

Don't buy seedlings – sow seeds instead. It's much cheaper and you'll get better results. All you have to do is scatter the seeds thinly. Each plant grows at least 30cm across, so don't scatter too many seeds. You can also drop them in here and there among other flowers as long as there is a space for them. The seeds will come up after the next shower of rain. They don't need a lot of water – normal winter rain is plenty. (The plants come from California, which has cool, rainy winters and hot, dry summers. In gardens, that's what they want.) Flowers are satiny

orange (although there are creams, pinks and reds as well) and you can expect the first blooms in September with the main flush in October, with further, lesser flushes through summer. These poppies don't pick well for vases, but they do drop a lot of seed and will come up next year from these. Take that as a warning if you don't like excess seedlings. These poppies are great city plants where they can't escape into bushland, but we don't recommend them for country areas or suburban areas near bushland. Pull the plants out when they start to look untidy.

Iceland poppy (*Papaver nudicaule*)

Just four crepey petals on a slender, hairy stem, but see a mass of them in bloom and you're a fan forever. They're just so elegant and charming, you can't help but love them. At this time of year, buy them in punnets of six to eight seedlings and aim to plant as big an area as you can. You'll need 16-20 plants for each square metre and when you plant the seedlings, examine each for signs of flower buds. If you see a little hairy ball in the middle, twist it out with your fingers and keep doing that after planting, too. It's important that you force the plants to grow out to about

20cm across before you let the flowers develop. If you let them flower while plants are young and small, they'll run out of steam way before their time. Water the seedlings in and then water often enough to keep the soil moist – probably once or twice a week if it doesn't rain. Once a month, water over with a soluble fertiliser formulated for flowers. Iceland poppies make terrific cut flowers and the more you pick, the more they produce. Expect seedlings planted now to be blooming in August and September. If your winter is very cold, delay planting until late winter for spring blooms.



The trick with growing Iceland poppies is to pinch out flower buds until plants are 20cm across.

Flanders poppies

(*Papaver rhoeas*)

These are the famous red Remembrance Day poppies, which are wildflowers of the fields of northern Europe. Start these from seed sown by scattering the seed thinly over prepared open ground.

Flanders poppies are much bigger plants than the neat and tidy Californian poppies. They grow about thigh-high and can look a little bulky and weedy, especially where winters aren't very cold. But in spring you forgive the plant its looks or perhaps you're just distracted by the gorgeous bright red flowers with a black blotch at the base of each petal. These not only look great in the garden but cut well for vases indoors, too.

Flanders poppies also produce a lot of seed but, if they drop in the garden, these don't seem to germinate as readily as those of the Californian poppies unless you have the cold winter the seeds need in order to germinate in spring. In milder climates, you can save the seeds, store them in an airtight glass jar and sow again the following autumn after spending a month in the fridge. When the plants have finished flowering, pull them out, giving the seed time to ripen if you want to collect it. Flanders poppies do best in southern Australia.





Matilija poppy

(*Romneya coulteri*)

Romneya, the matilija poppy, comes from the coastal ranges of southern California and western Mexico, where most of the rain falls in winter, but generally it's fairly dry. It's a spreading perennial and spread it does, so this is one plant to position where its expansion can be easily contained in the garden.

It's a multi-stemmed, sprawling thing which grows 2m tall. The stems are thick and clothed with lobed, grey-green leaves. Starting in late spring and extending into summer, big, white, six-petalled flowers emerge. These have the typical crepe texture of

poppies but also a showy central boss of golden stamens making the flowers look like fried eggs. They have a light scent. As soon as flowering has reached its peak, stop watering, as summer dryness is a good way to minimise the plant's unwanted spread. If you plant *Romneya* in a bed with other perennials or shrubs, they ought to be from a Mediterranean-type climate, too. In March, cut the plant to ground level and leave the soil bone dry until normal cool season rains begin. It is not a good choice for areas with high summer rainfall, such as along the East Coast.

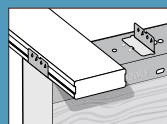


MODWOOD
decking

The Sustainable Alternative

- ✓ Easy to install
- ✓ 90% recycled materials (approx)
- ✓ Low maintenance
- ✓ High durability

Silver Gum with KlevaKlip



Built in groove
for the KlevaKlip
concealed fixing
system.

MODWOOD is leading the way with its environmentally friendly, low maintenance range of composite decking boards. These boards are manufactured in Australia from recycled milk bottles and reclaimed wood fibre.

ModWood's NEW Natural Grain Collection is inspired by colours and grains found in timber. Colours include Black Bean, Jarrah and Silver Gum. The Natural Grain Collection has an embossed grain finish on the surface of both faces to give a softer more natural appearance.

This new range has been designed to be fixed in place with the KlevaKlip concealed fixing system which avoids the need for top fasteners.

Installation is also made easy due to its long and straight length.

ModWood is available in two decking profiles – 137 x 23mm and 88 x 23mm and one screening profile – 68 x 17mm.



www.modwood.com.au

Shirley poppies

(*Papaver rhoeas* varieties)



These are hybrids of the Flanders poppy and though similar, their foliage is not as coarse and there's a greater range of flower colours – pinks, scarlets and white. The petals do not have the black blotch at the base as in Flanders poppies. Seedlings of Shirley poppies are not easy to find and even seeds can be

hard to come by, but sowing seeds is the same as for starting Flanders poppies.

Sown now, the seeds will germinate in a few weeks in milder areas but not until early spring in places where winters are very cold. Where the plants germinate early, flowers come in September but it can be October or

November before you see blooms in cold areas.

The flowers are quite similar to those of Iceland poppies except that the petals seem even more as if made from crinkled crepe paper. And like Iceland poppies, they cut well for vases indoors. *Tip:* pick them when you can see a gash of colour in the unopened bud.

They're bigger plants than Iceland poppies, so you'll need at least a few square metres of growing space in order to get a good display. Otherwise plant them among other big-gish perennials or taller annuals – Shirley poppies grow tall enough to hold their own. Being from the Flanders poppy tribe, they do best in cooler, southern areas of Australia.



Blue poppy

(*Meconopsis betonicifolia*)

Perennials from the Himalayan region, blue poppies are probably the most desirable of all because of the rare, clear blue shade of their flowers. Alas, most of us have to be content with a photograph because these poppies are not happy in most parts of Australia.

Blue poppies need a summer that's mild to warm with mostly cool nights and a winter that's fairly cold and also moist. Here, that means Tasmania and highland areas on the mainland which get good rainfall. Given good growing conditions, the blue poppy will grow about 1.8m tall but in Australia it is usually less than half that height and the plants may only live a few years, too.

If you think you have the climate for them, grow blue poppies in open, acid soil that contains plenty of rotted organic matter and give them a spot where they will receive brightly lit, broken shade in the afternoon in summer. The soil must be damp and cool at all times. ✱

The most voluptuous of the poppies, orientals are perennials, the blooms of which can stand a metre or more tall. Coming from Central Asia, they need a few decent frosts in winter or they may not bloom properly. The plants are rather big, developing a mass of hairy, deeply cut leaves, each about 30cm long. Flowers, which appear in spring, can be single, semi-double or fully double globes in white or shades of pink, red, orange or salmon. Many varieties have flowers in two colours and some also feature a black blotch at the base of the petals. When blooming ends, the plants start to die back to ground level then reappear in autumn. They like autumns to be cool and rainy and if winters are moist too, they'll keep growing slowly. Come spring they explode into growth. They thrive on winter rain, but don't go crazy with the fertiliser, as they are not big eaters.

Oriental poppies

(*Papaver orientale*)

