



Papaver somniferum

Opium poppies have to be one of the quickest and most satisfying flowers to grow. Sow them in March and they'll be in flower in June bringing the bees in to the garden. Cut the seed pods to use fresh in flower arrangements or dry them for later on and save the seeds for scattering on bread or biscuits or use to flavour an old fashioned poppy seed cake.



Sowing

Opium poppies resent transplanting so direct sow where you'd like them to flower.

This can be as easy as just scattering the seed on the soil but a little bit of effort will pay dividends.

They grow to about 90cm / 36in so mid border is a good position but a few creeping towards the front will give a natural look.

Poppies like sun and good drainage but will cope with a little bit of light shade.

During March and April rake the soil to give a fine tilth. If the ground is very dry water before sowing. Sprinkle the seeds over the surface as finely as possible, mix with a little dry sand if that makes it easier to see

Water in with a can fitted with a fine rose making sure they don't get swamped. There's no need to cover with soil.

Label with your lovely, handmade wooden label if you can bear to use it and keep an eye out for slugs.

The seeds can also be sown in August and September for earlier flowering the following year.



The seeds will germinate quickly. When they have two pairs of proper leaves thin so they are about 30cm apart.



There's no need to water the seedlings unless the weather is very dry.

Left to their own devices they will self seed around the garden but they are easy to pull up if you don't want them.





The flowers in June are an absolute magnet for bees which collect the pollen.





Seed Saving

If you keep on deadheading the flowers the plants will carry on producing but you can also leave the flowers to develop seed heads. so you can use the dried seed heads in arrangements

Cut the pods with a nice long stem, tie a paper bag around the heads and hang in a dry place.

Give the bag a good shake to get all of the seeds out of the pods.

Store the seeds in a cool, dry place. You can use an old jam jar or if you'd like to pass them on we have a blog post on making seed packets. Use the seedheads in flower arrangements.

Remember to scatter some of the seeds about in August or September to give you earlier flowering plants next year and save the pods for arrangements.