

# Annual and Perennial Poppies

POPPIES DESERVE A PLACE IN ANY GARDEN: in wildflower and meadow plantings, perennial borders, cutting gardens or mixed-shrub borders. Their flower colors range from vibrant to subdued—from deepest crimson, bright orange and yellow to soft pink, dusky peach, rose, lilac and cream. Flowers may be single, double or semidouble, with amazing texture and size. The Iceland poppy produces flowers up to seven inches across above attractive blue-green, segmented foliage. The Shirley poppy bears single or double crepe-paper-like blooms edged with white. Field, or Flanders, poppies sport single, crimson flowers, which suit wildflower plantings perfectly.

In a border garden, poppies combine beautifully with lamb's ears, cornflowers, larkspur, Shasta daisy, and veronica. For a meadow look, you can't go wrong with a sowing of poppies among lupine, coreopsis, Indian blanket, black-eyed Susan, and cornflower—the colors complement each other and the various plants extend the flowering season into fall. Poppies vary in height from 2 to 3 feet tall, although there are dwarf strains of the Iceland poppy that reach only 12 inches. The latter work well in rock gardens, in containers, and at the front edge of a border. Most poppies look good in the middle or towards the rear of perennial beds.

## ANNUAL POPPIES

Corn poppy *Papaver rhoeas*, grows 2 to 3 feet tall, blooms from late spring through summer and bears red, purple, lilac, white, salmon, peach, pink or orange flowers with a distinctive dark blotch at the base of each petal. The Shirley poppy, a selection from the species, grows to 4 feet tall; its pastel blooms lack the blotch but have a narrow white or tinted edge on each petal.

## PERENNIAL POPPIES

Alpine poppy *P. alpinum*, grows 5 to 10 inches tall, blooms from late spring to summer and bears white, yellow, or occasionally orange or red flowers. It is hardy to Zone 5. Iceland poppy *P. nudicaule*, grows 1 to 2 feet tall, blooms from late spring through summer and produces orange, red, yellow, apricot, pink, salmon or white flowers. It is hardy to Zone 2. Oriental poppy *P. orientale*, grows 2 to 4 feet tall, blooms from late spring to midsummer and bears scarlet, salmon, pink, peach, white or rose blooms, usually with a black blotch at the base of the petals. The foliage dies back after flowering but begins to regrow in fall. It is hardy to Zone 4.

## GROWING FROM SEED

Poppies grow easily from seed. Be sure to select the correct species for an annual or perennial planting. They are known for self-sowing, sometimes with abandon, and you may find seedlings popping up all around the garden bed. They are not invasive and the seedlings are easy to pull up if they land in unwanted places.

Poppies are frost tolerant and germinate best in cool weather and soil. Sow seeds as early as the ground can be worked in spring. Poppies bloom profusely under cool growing conditions. When temperatures rise poppy plants tend to bloom only sporadically.

Select a site in full sun, one that receives at least six hours of direct sun daily. In warm climates (zones), plants do best with some protective shade at midday. Poppies grow in almost any kind of soil with good drainage. Mix the tiny poppy seeds with some sand to make even spacing easier. Sow thinly where you want the plants to grow in the bed and cover them with a very thin layer of fine soil (poppies germinate best with some light) and water the area. Keep the soil moist, but not soggy, until seeds germinate. When

seedlings are about 1 inch tall, thin them to stand 6 to 10 inches apart. If you're growing annual poppies, sow more than once during spring to extend the colour season in the garden.