

In the Garden

All About the Petunias!

Every year I buy some Petunia seed but it's always the same damn thing – Double Grandiflora from T and T Seeds. This year I looked at their seed catalogue and realized there are so many types of Petunia and I really know nothing about them. So, in the interests of sharing garden info (and apologies to the experts that know all of this already) here is my guide to selecting Petunias.

There are 5 different groups of Petunias mainly based on flower size..

Multiflora petunias are the most durable and prolific. They have smaller, but more abundant flowers and are ideal for summer bedding or in a mixed border (because they are more tolerant to wet weather).

Grandiflora petunias have very large flowers and are best grown in containers or hanging baskets (because they are more susceptible to rain damage). These large petunias can rot in our moist spring weather.

Floribundas: Floribundas are intermediate between the grandiflora and the multiflora groups. They are free-flowering like the multiflora varieties and produce medium-sized blooms.

Millifloras: Milliflora petunias are much smaller than any other petunias on the market. The flowers are only 1 to 1½ inches wide, but they are prolific and last all season!

Spreading or Trailing Petunias: These are low growing but spread as much as 3 to 4 feet. They form a beautiful, colorful groundcover because the flowers form along the entire length of each stem. They can be used in window boxes or hanging baskets. As they sprout along



their stems they are also known as **Wave Petunias.**

Petunia colours are pretty amazing! There is a complete colour palette including black and white. There are Petunias that look like night skies; there are petunias that have spots, stripes, ruffles and bands. If you have a good sense of colour you can make some amazing colour combinations.

Here at the south end of the island, we can grow Petunias with ease. If you want to create your own Petunia design maybe you want to start them from seed. The seeds of Petunia are basically dust. Growers tend to pellet the seed so you have a chance of seeing what you are sowing. I have a grow unit in my house so I start the seeds at the beginning of March. Be really careful not to overwater and don't cover the seeds as they

need light to germinate. I usually put a bit of recycled clear plastic film over the soil until I see a sprout. You will want to pay close attention to the seedlings as Petunia seed is expensive and losing a batch of seedlings could be pricey and annoying. Once your seedlings are growing on nicely you can transplant them to larger pots. When the soil is nice and warm, pop them in the garden. A funny story AJ told me at Dinters was that when the Petunias seedlings first come into the store people will rush to buy them and plant them out. The late frost (or slugs) get them and they are back a few weeks later to buy more Petunia starts. This story is exactly the same for Tomato starts. In the words of Country Music star Kenny Rogers, "You gotta know when to hold them", and we would add, know when to plant them! When you get your Petunias growing well, don't forget to deadhead them frequently to get continuous bloom. Something I am going to try this year is to plant more seeds very late. Hopefully, this will give me a fresh young crop of Petunias in late summer when everything looks dead. So try some of the different kinds of Petunias and enjoy the display!



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