



trellis

Growing Summer Flowers for Cutting

It's always a delight to cut and bring inside summer flowers which you have grown yourself. Many of these flowers are easily and cheaply grown from seed and can be started indoors in spring before being planted outside when the weather is good. They can then be grown in open soil or if you don't have much space they will be happy in garden pots. These type of plants are called annuals as they grow and flower in one summer and do not grow again the next year, however you can collect seed from them to use to sow and grow more the following spring. Cosmos is one of the best flowers for cutting and arranging inside. They come in a range of colours from white through to dark pink, and packets of mixed colours can be bought. Cosmos grows to be about 1.2m tall, which is fine in the garden but for growing in pots it is easier to manage the shorter varieties (dwarf), which grow to 60cm. Cosmos seeds/plants are Half-hardy which means they cannot tolerate frost, so always have to be started off inside in small pots or grown outside only when the last threat of frost is over.

What you will need:

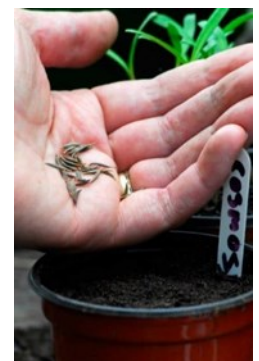
- Cosmos seeds of your choice (for shorter plants choose a dwarf mix)
- Small containers, individual yoghurt pots, with holes for drainage, or last years summer bedding modules
- Plastic trays to hold your pots or modules, no holes—to catch drips
- Good quality seed sowing or multi-purpose compost (Store compost indoors to warm it up for comfortable handling)
- Labels and a marker pen
- Clear plastic tray or bag to cover pots



Cosmos flowers

Step 1 Ensure there are no lumps in the compost. Use your hands to break the compost into fine 'breadcrumbs' - this can be a lovely sensory activity. Fill the pots with compost and *very gently* press down, you can use the base of another pot, ensuring there are no air pockets. Gently water, do not soak.

Step 2 Sow two seeds on the surface of each pot and cover with 3mm, a light covering, of compost. Label and date. Cover pots with a clear plastic tray or a plastic bag (use an elastic band to secure around the pot, use old ice lolly sticks or old plant labels to stop the covering touching the compost/germinating seeds.



2 seeds per pot

Step 3 Place pots in trays to stop water seeping onto furnishings, and leave in a warm place no lower than 16 °c. Make sure trays are not behind curtains or blinds at night when temperatures drop.

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Growing Summer Flowers for Cutting *continued*

Step 4 Once the seeds have germinated and you can see the first 2 leaves place the pots in a bright place. Too much sunlight will burn the seedlings so have fleece or something to shade them from this. If both seeds have germinated remove the smallest, leaving the other to grow on.



Germinated seeds



Potting up seedlings

Step 5 The seedlings will now grow several pairs of leaves. At this stage you can pot them up into a slightly larger pot, 7cm, using multi purpose compost to feed them. Use a pencil or similar to loosen the roots and only hold the seedling leaves to move it, any damage to the stem will kill the little plant. Grow on without cover, ensuring the compost is moist, not wet, and the small plant is covered from direct sunshine.

Step 6 Before planting outside the plants need to be hardened off. Once the weather is mild enough (end of May/beginning of June) place the plants outside during the day and bring in at night. Harden off for about a week until you are sure the temperature will not drop again.

Step 7 You can now plant your small plants into a large garden pot. Again plant into a good multi purpose compost, adding a slow release fertiliser to feed the plant or give it a liquid feed every 2 weeks.

Space the plants about 30cm apart, firm the compost and water. Place the container in a sunny position, they do not flower in shade.



Large pot



Planted in the garden

If you want to plant into a garden bed, then ensure they have well drained soil and a sunny place. And if you have grown a tall variety you will have to stake with a bamboo cane or similar to prevent the plant from falling to one side. Dwarf varieties don't need staking.

Top tips Water regularly, particularly in a drought.

To ensure a succession of flowers through to the autumn—cut off the dead flower heads regularly, as the seed heads prevent flowering.

When cutting for indoor arrangements cut just above a pair of leaves to ensure new flower stems grow.