

July 22, 2015



Much Loved Flower
By Barbara Schuchart
UCCE Master Gardener of El Dorado County

Petunias are one of the most popular flowering annuals. They come in a wide range of varieties, colors, and shades. Petunias are nonstop bloomers, from early summer to frost, and are very reliable performers. They are easy to grow, both in the garden and in containers. I have grown petunias for quite a few years, and they are definitely one of my favorites.

One of the most important requirements for growing petunias successfully is a location with plenty of light. They need at least five to six hours of good sunlight. They do perform poorly when the temperature reaches above 90 degrees and may stop growing if it is too hot for a long period of time. You can cut them back by half and fertilize with a balanced, liquid fertilizer made for flowering plants.

Many types of petunias also need to be deadheaded which means you need to pluck off the spent flowers for the plant to continue blooming. Other types can drop the blooms by themselves. Deadheading not only helps prolong blooming, it also keeps plants looking fresh, healthy and well-groomed.

Petunias can be challenging during droughts. They like consistently moist, but never soggy soil. Hanging baskets and other containers also need more frequent watering, perhaps as often as daily, depending on their size and the volume of soil they contain. Soil that is light and loamy is best, with a pH between 6.0 and 7.0. Petunias should be fertilized monthly.

Near the end of summer, it is good to cut back rangy plants about half to encourage new growth. Sometimes petunias do come back the following year, which is a wonderful surprise!

Petunias fall into four distinct categories, based on flower size and growth habit. Some are more suited to container growing, while others are better for planting in the garden.

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Grandiflora are the most popular type. They produce large flowers that can have single or double blooms, and the blooms can be three to four inches across. They can be planted in containers or hanging baskets, or can even be used to cascade over walls. They can also be used in beds and borders.

Multiflora petunias have more compact, smaller flowers that bloom abundantly throughout the summer.

Milliflora petunias are compact miniature plants with small flowers only an inch to an inch and a half in diameter. They make good edging plants and are also attractive in containers with other flowers.

Ground cover or spreading petunias are only about six inches tall but spread rapidly and can cover a large area. They're ideal for a hillside garden, a retaining wall, or in hanging baskets or window boxes.

One of my favorite types of petunia is the wave petunia. It grows four to six inches tall and can spread up to four feet. Flowers cover this plant all summer.

A note of caution, in my yard deer seem to be fond of petunias. So be careful where you plant them; it helps me to have petunias close to the house.

One type of petunia that I will be looking for this year is the African Sunset petunia, an All-American selection winner in 2014. It received the award for both its stunning orange color and its garden performance of exceptional season-long blooms.

I hope you'll enjoy gardening with petunias as much as I do!

There is no scheduled public Master Gardener class this Saturday, July 25th.

UCCE Master Gardeners are available to answer your questions at local farmers markets and in their office every Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at the office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities throughout the county, go to our Master Gardener website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmg>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter. You can also find us on Facebook.