

Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery Success Sheet No. 38

Primula

Background

Primroses are the best of the pot plants that flower all winter and spring. Not many flowers display such an array of colours and are as generous with their gift of bloom over several weeks as the primrose.

Primroses are members of the genus *Primula*. Hundreds of species are native to cold and temperate regions of the Northern Hemisphere. The Himalayas are rich in primulas, while many more are native to China and Japan. Primroses enjoy the cool, damp weather of early spring.

The common primrose has a 3-inch-long flower stock with large flowers, 1-1½ inches across, clustered in a rosette of oblong, wrinkled leaves. They are available in white, yellow, red, or blue.

Indoor Care

Primroses are vigorous and sturdy plants that will continue to grow and flower indoors all winter. They should have at least five hours of winter sun each day. As the new leaves push out from the center, the outer leaves will fade and die.

Remove the old leaves by pinching them out from the base with your fingers. Don't allow the old leaves to remain on the plant as decay can spread to the next layer of foliage. To make room for the new blooms, remove the old flowers as they fade. Primroses kept in a cool room or basement under fluorescent lights will bloom profusely.

If the plants are kept in a warm room, they should be put into a cooler place at night;

doing so will extend their period of flowering. When the plants are in full bloom, they will require regular fertilizing with a water-soluble 20-20-20 all-purpose fertilizer.

Outdoor Care

Primroses can be planted in a moist and lightly shaded spot in early May when the garden soil is workable and spring growth has begun. Add peat moss and manure to regular garden soil to produce a rich, deep, well-drained soil that primroses prefer.

Do not allow them to dry out, especially in the summer. Excessive dryness will result in a woody rootstock that will permanently weaken the plants and decrease their chance of survival through the winter. They require moisture during the winter also. They should be mulched and covered with evergreen boughs to protect them from the drying winter winds.

Division

The center crown will become surrounded by plantlets after the second year of growth. These plantlets should be dug, divided and planted deeply, with the crown replanted in its original location. Division should take place before flowering or immediately after. If dividing after the plant has flowered, make sure the new plantings are watered well. If you want to wait till fall to divide the plants, make sure you do it early enough so that they can become established before winter.

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