



RIVER & SEA

## Growing Your Ranunculus

Ranunculus are a much anticipated spring bloom and our customers eagerly await their appearance every year. Plump buds open to reveal layer after layer of lush silky petals. They have a good vase life when harvested for cut flowers and come in a beautiful range of colours. Ranunculus grow from a corm, which looks a bit like a tiny shrivelled brown octopus. There are a few tricks to growing them successfully, but it's well worth it!

### When and Where to Grow

Ranunculus are a little picky about their conditions, preferring the cool temperatures of late winter and early spring to get established. The plants won't tolerate frozen soil, though a light frost is okay. Once flowers begin to form, they need to be protected from frost or the buds will be damaged. Once the weather warms up to be over 18C during the day, the plants will begin to go dormant. Ranunculus prefer full sun, though in warm conditions some afternoon shade can help to extend their season. Well draining healthy soil is important to prevent the corms from rotting. They can be grown in pots, though they make go dormant a little sooner than if they are planted right in the soil.

At our farm near Vancouver, our outdoor ranunculus crop is started in mid February, then planted outside in early to mid March. They typically bloom in late May and early June.

### Planting

Ranunculus do best when a few specific steps are taken to prepare them for planting. Your ranunculus corms are dormant when you receive them. To wake them up they need to be soaked for 3-4 hours in tap water. Change the water every hour or leave the tap trickling to maintain some oxygen in the water. They will swell to about double their size in this time. Once rehydrated you can take one of two approaches:

1/ Plant your rehydrated corms directly in the soil where you plant to grow them, covered by about 2" of soil. Plant with the points facing down about 6-9" apart. This approach is great if you want a low fuss experience and/or the weather and your soil conditions are just right. Otherwise, try the second method.

2/ Pot up your rehydrated corms into small cell packs with moist (but not saturated) potting mix, covering by 1-2" and store them in a cool spot, above freezing (ideally 5-12C). Garages or basements are usually good places. Your corms don't need light during this time but make sure

that the potting mix doesn't dry out. After 10-21 days you should see little white roots emerging from the crown, and little nubs that will become stalks. Check on them regularly, more often if they are in a warmer spot. Once the roots and/or stalks are  $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ " long, you can plant them with the points facing down in their final growing spot, covered by about 2" of soil. This is the method we use as the farm.

Your soil should be well loosened. At the farm we only apply fertilizers if it's deemed necessary after taking a soil test. If you think your soil could use additional nutrition, a small amount of an organic balanced fertiliser can be incorporated in your soil at planting time.

### **Plant Care and Harvesting**

Ranunculus appreciate moist soil and will go dormant if they experience dry conditions. When temperatures warm up, make sure they are not drying out. Water as needed depending on weather conditions. Do not overwater or the corms can rot. Once they begin to flower, flowers can be harvested using sharp snips. They are ready to harvest when the layers of petals begin to separate, and the bud feels soft like a marshmallow. Place stems in clean water and change the water regularly. If you don't harvest your flowers, remove spent blooms to encourage your plant to continue to flower.

### **Digging Ranunculus Corms**

In early summer, once the leaves on your plants have turned yellow and started to die back, you can dig up the corms. Shake off loose soil and trim foliage back to the base. Store them in paper bags in a warm dry place. They will likely have multiplied so you'll have more to plant the following year. If you choose to leave them in the ground, they will likely begin to grow in the fall. If it's a mild winter with the right soil conditions, they might survive the winter. Digging them and replanting in late winter or early spring is a little safer though.

Happy growing!

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