

LISIANTHUS ANYONE?

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Have you ever heard of the lisianthus? Lisianthus or *Eustoma grandiflorum* is a wildflower native to the western prairies that has been selectively bred to produce large flowers in a wide range of colors. Traced to a wildflower known as the Prairie Gentian or Prairie Rose, the lisianthus is nowadays often seen in garden centers or florists as a potted plant, bedding annual or cut flower. The unusual blue-green foliage sets off the purple, pink, white, and pink or purple-edged flowers that look almost rose or tulip-like in appearance. This appearance is further accentuated in the ruffled double-petaled cultivars. From time to time, I have seen lisianthus at several garden centers and florists in our county and believe that their unique beauty is worth a second look.

The lisianthus first became a commercial interest in the 1980's as a cut flower and potted plant. Florida has done its share of breeding this unique plant. In fact in 1985, the University of Florida's Gulf Coast Research and Education Center began a breeding program focused on enhancing the great qualities of lisianthus. A good deal of breeding work produced some plants that were better adapted to a garden setting. In 1995, a cultivar named 'Florida Blue' was released out of that work. 'Florida Blue' can be used as a bedding plant as it is both semi-dwarf and heat-tolerant in regards to flower production. Another cultivar, 'Maurine Blue' is a taller, heat-tolerant selection that can be used as a bedding plant or cut and used in bouquets.

Some types of lisianthus are naturally tall and have a tendency to fall over. Accordingly, taller varieties can either be staked or several plants clustered together for support. The taller types are ideal for cut flower production.

You can obtain seed to grow your own lisianthus from many seed catalogs. However, you have to be patient as it may take up to six months to see the first blooms. With non-heat tolerant varieties, temperature is also critical as to if they bloom as an annual or bloom the

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next year and behave as a perennial. It may be best to just purchase started transplants or potted plants already in bloom. After the blooms have faded, you can cut the plants back and expect a repeat bloom in about six weeks. Botanically speaking, while grown mostly as an annual, lisianthus is actually a biennial that may behave almost like a short-lived perennial.

If you intend to try them in a flower bed, select a site that has excellent drainage. They like our slightly alkaline soils and also appreciate our drier winter weather. Plant lisianthus in a full sun

to part shade area with about 12 inches between plants. In our hardiness zone, October and November are acceptable times to plant this flower. Lisianthus look their best as an informal border planting.

Lisianthus is an interesting if not challenging plant to try. If anything, consider growing lisianthus as a nice container specimen and enjoy the spectacular floral display as each bloom will last at least one week.

photos courtesy of:
University of Arkansas
Cooperative Extension Service

Resource:

Gilman, E.F. (2007) *Eustoma grandiflorum Lisianthus*. UF/IFAS Extension Service.

Harbaugh, B. (2003) *New Plants for Florida - Lisianthus*. UF/IFAS Extension Service.

Naeve, L. (2002) *Lisianthus: A Great Garden Cut Flower*. Iowa State University Extension.

Klingaman, G. (2006) *Plant of the Week: Lisianthus/ Eustoma grandiflorum*. The University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service.

Harbaugh, B.K. & Scott, J.W. (1996) 'Florida Blue' Semi-dwarf Lisianthus. *Gulf Coast Research and Education Center, University of Florida, 5007 60th Street East, Bradenton, FL 34203. HortScience 31(6):1057-1058. 1996.*

For more information on all types of flowering plants suitable for both beds and containers, please contact our Master Gardeners on the Plant Lifeline at 941.764.4340 from 1:00pm-4:00pm Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Our office is located at 25550 Harbor View Road, Suite 3, in Port Charlotte.

MONTHLY PLANT CLINICS ARE SATURDAYS FROM 9:00AM-12:00PM.

- **Powell's Nursery** 1st Saturday of month
- **Peachland Publix**..... 2nd Saturday of month
- **Home Depot (Punta Gorda, Port Charlotte, Englewood)** 3rd Saturday of month
- **Lowes** 4th Saturday of month

PLANT CLINICS AVAILABLE ACROSS THE COUNTY:

- **Demonstration Garden** (6900 Florida Street, PG) Thursdays 9:00am-11:00am.
- **Englewood/Charlotte Public Library** Thursdays 10:00am-1:00pm.
- **Mid-County Regional Library** 1st and 3rd Thursday of month 1:00pm-3:00pm.
- **Punta Gorda Library** 2nd and 4th Wednesday of month from 10:00am-1:00pm.
- **Edison College Learning Resources Library** 3rd Tuesday of month 1:00pm-4:00pm.
- **South Gulf Cove Learning Garden** (13577 Blake Drive, PC) 3rd Wednesday of month from 9:00am-12:00pm.

Ralph Mitchell (Ralph.Mitchell@charlottetfl.com) is the County Extension Director/Horticulture Agent for Charlotte County Extension Service. Contact a volunteer Master Gardener from 1:00pm-4:00pm Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 941.764.4340 or by email (Master.Gardener@charlottetfl.com).

For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Steele, at 941.764.4351. Allison can help educate you about the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program so that you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.