

Q: I would like to grow hollyhocks, but the ones I plant always get covered with rust and I have to take them out. Are there any resistant Hollyhocks?

A: *Alcea rosea* and a few close relatives are the old-fashioned cottage garden flower we call Hollyhocks. Originating in the Mediterranean and Western Asia, they have been grown in the west since the mid 1500's. Reaching 6-8' (60-250cm) in height, hollyhocks are the backbone of many cut flower gardens and borders. The plants can spread to 24" (40-60cm) with large rough leaves that feel slightly prickly to the touch. The large, inviting blossoms are held up in large spikes.

**Alcea  
rosea**

MALVACEAE



Common name	Hollyhock
Bot. synonyms	
Origin	Mediterranean, W. Asia (intr. 1573)
Type	Biennial, some vars. flower first year
Habit	Tall, erect
Height	60-250 cm/2-8'
Spread	40-60 cm/16-24"
Leaves	Large, shallow-lobed, rough-hairy, rosette (1st year)
Flower	Long, racemose spike
Colors	Pink, purple, white, yellow shades, single or double
Utilization	Border background, against walls, cut flower, typical English cottage garden plant
Medicinal	Flowers edible, close relative <i>Althaea officinalis</i> is an old medicinal plant
Germination	1-2 weeks, cool 10-12 C/50-55F
Preculture	April, May in annual cultivation
Direct seed	June, July as biennial
Season	June, Jul, Aug (HB), Aug, Sept (HHA)
Site	Sun, sheltered
Soil	Loamy, moderately rich, well drained but not dry

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**Varieties:** Suitable for annual culture: 'Annual Singles' (old-fashioned, single, early), 'Summer Carnival' (120-150 cm, early, double, red, rose, yellow, white). 'Majorette' (dwarf, 60-75 cm, 10 cm dbl flowers, rose crimson, lavender, pink, yellow, white shades), 'Powder Puffs' (semi-dwarf, large dbl flowers).

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**In my garden:** I usually start annual hollyhocks at the end of April in a frost-proof greenhouse (10-12 C/50-55 F is OK). Plants are vigorous and they are grown in 8 cm pots until planted out in early June. In the first summer the plants do not reach their full spread, so I normally plant them about 30 cm apart. Don't let the soil dry out. Flowering starts quite late here, mostly in September. Hollyhocks make great cut flowers and the buds will open in water. My usual varieties are Annual singles and Summer Carnival. But my absolute favorite is var. *nigra* (actually very dark violet), which has flowered in my garden for three years now. I planted lots of these and also an old yellow-flowered species (from an Estonian botanical garden) in June 96. They have huge rosettes of leaves and will, hopefully, survive the winter and flower next summer. Hollyhocks (as biennials or perennials) are easily attacked by rust diseases, but I haven't had any problems so far. As a precaution you should not grow them in the same spot for more than 1-2 years. I don't use any fungicides.

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The Garden Hollyhock  
*Alcea rosea* Narrative and Photos  
by Curtis Swift,  
Area Extension Agent (Horticulture)

- Scientific Name: *Alcea rosea*
  - Synonym: *Althaea rosea*
- From the Greek: *althaia* (to cure)
  - due to the medicinal qualities of some species
- Family: Malvaceae
- USDA Hardiness Zones: 2-8
- Type: herbaceous perennial, annual or biennial

**Introduction:**

The Garden Hollyhock (*Althaea rosea* Cav.) is one of the oldest plants in cultivation, having been found in Chinese gardens by the earliest European visitors. Gardens of yesterday were not complete without the tall flowering spires of this easy-to-grow plant.



Hollyhocks grow to heights of five to eight feet or more, flowering along straight stems between June and August. Pinching one or two times early in the growing season gives shorter, plants with more branches. The individual flowers are bell-shaped, 3 ½ inches (8 cm) and more in width, with separate petals of vivid colors from white through pink to scarlet and the deepest maroon. The cultivar 'Nigra' is called the Chocolate Hollyhock due to its dark chocolate blossoms. There are double, ruffled begonia-like flowers as well as single forms with five petals. Petals may be smooth or lightly fringed. The leaves are rough-textured and may be up to 10 inches across.

*Alcea rosea* probably originated in Asia Minor. While originally a perennial, this plant is used as an annual, biennial, and perennial in today's gardens. In northern areas of the county the hollyhock is treated as an annual, but usually will survive and bloom the second year if provided winter protection. In Grand Junction, I have had Hollyhocks come back for several years and become taller and more striking each year. A layer of mulch over the plants for winter protection as well as winter watering certainly helps.

Perennial and biennial forms develop a rosette of ground-hugging leaves the first year. One to several flower stalks develop the following year(s). The hollyhock readily self-seeds and may become a nuisance if seedlings are not culled from the garden.

Annual forms exist to include 'Indian Spring', 'Summer Carnival', 'Silver Puffs', 'Majorette' and 'Pinafore'. These are reported to produce flowers the first year they are seeded.

This plant is effective as a background plant against a building or fence where it is protected from wind. Hollyhock is also useful in mass plantings to provide screening. In windy sites, staking will be required. Plants are short lived perennials especially in wet, poorly drained soil and are treated as biennials, although self seeding reproduces them well.

**Culture:**

Hollyhocks prefer a rich soil with lots of organic matter and a warm sunny location. They require full sun as the plant dislikes any amount of shade. Over watering creates more problems with diseases and will result in a shortened plant life.

**Propagation:**

Propagation is usually by seeds, which should be sown an eighth of an inch deep. Seed can be started in a greenhouse eight weeks prior to the last spring frost. A germination temperature of 72o Fahrenheit (22C) will result in germination within five to ten days. Plants are then set into the garden at the same time as the last spring frost. The hollyhocks do not transplant easily.

Seed can be sown directly into the garden two weeks before the average last spring frost. Seed will normally germinate in 10 to 14 days.

Transplanting is best done in the spring taking care to avoid plant damage. The roots are large and the growth is from a few strong buds at the crown. If planted in the fall in areas where frost heaving is a problem the plants may heave out of the ground and plant death may result. Applying a three to four inch layer of mulch over the plants after the ground has frozen in the fall will help reduce this problem.

**Related Species:**

The common garden hollyhock (*Alcea rosea*) is one of approximately 60 species of *Alcea* originating from temperate Europe and Asia. *Alcea ficifolia*, a perennial hollyhock from Siberia, has been crossed with *Alcea rosea* to create more vigorous, healthier perennial hybrid plants.

**Problems:**

Hollyhock Rust (*Puccinia malvacearum*) causes formation of round swellings or bumps on the undersides of the leaves. Rust infects leaves, stems, bracts and other green plant parts. Brown pinhead size spots develop on the undersides of leaves. On the upper leaf surface the spots are larger, bright yellow or orange with reddish centers. The spots run together causing death of large leaf areas. Ash gray pustules form on the lower leaf surfaces during rainy weather. Remove infected leaves when first noticed. This fungus survives on old plant debris so it is important to destroy old plant parts at the end of the growing season. Fungicide sprays are available which help manage this disease problem.

The hollyhock weevil (*Apion longirostre*) is a snout beetle approximately  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch (5 mm) long. With a long snout it eats holes in leaves and damages flower buds and seeds. The female weevil has the longest snout and chews holes in developing buds in which to lay eggs. The grub stage of this insect feeds on the developing seeds. Pupation takes place within the seed. In Colorado, some adults emerge in August and September while the remainder stay within the seed and emerge the following spring. There is one generation of weevils each year.

Lace bugs suck sap from the underside of leaves which are covered with brown specks of excrement. This insect is a beautiful small bug with transparent wings reticulated or netted in a lacelike effect. The head is covered with a hood.

Other insects reported as problems on the Hollyhock include:

- Aphids
- Beetles
  - Japanese
  - Oriental
  - Rose Chafer
  - Spotted Cucumber
- Borers
  - burdock
  - European Corn
  - Stalk
- Bugs
  - Hollyhock Plant Bug
  - Tarnished Plant Bug
- Butterflies
  - Painted Beauty
  - Painted Lady
- Caterpillar
  - Yellow Wollybear
- Leaf miner
- Leaf Roller
- Leaf Skeletonizer
- Mealybug
- Mite
  - two spotted
- Moth
  - Abutilon
  
- Scale
  - Brown Scale
  - Latania
  - Lesser Snow
- Slug
  - Spotted Garden
- Thrips
  - Gladiolus
  - Hollyhock
- Weevil
  - Boll

Viruses are also reported to be a problem with hollyhock. More information on hollyhock viruses can be found at [http://biology.anu.edu.au/Groups/MES/vide/famly082.htm#Althaea rosea](http://biology.anu.edu.au/Groups/MES/vide/famly082.htm#Althaea%20rosea). A link to this site is provided in the following list of references.

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# *Alcea rosea*

Common name:	Hollyhock	Family:	Malvaceae
Author:	L.	Botanical references:	100, 200
Synonyms:	Althaea rosea ((L.)Cav.)		
Known Hazards:	None known		
Range:	The original habitat is obscure, it is probably of hybrid origin. A garden escape in Britain[17].		
Habitat:	Not known in a truly wild situation.		
Plants For A Future Rating (1-5):	3		

Other Possible Synonyms:	From various places across the web, may not be correct. See <a href="#">below</a> .
	Althaea ficifolia[G]
Other Common Names:	From various places around the Web, may not be correct. See <a href="#">below</a> . Garden Hollyhock [H], Gul Hero [E], Gulhatmi [E], Hollyhock [B,H,L,P,MS], Jung K'Uei [E], Khatmah Barri [E], Malva Real [E], Shu K'Uei [E], Ward Al Khatmi [E], Wu K'Uei Hwa [E],
Epithets:	From a <a href="#">Dictionary of Botanical Epithets</a> rosea = rose colored;
Other Range Info:	From the <a href="#">Ethnobotany Database</a> Chile; China; Iraq; Kurdistan; Spain; Turkey

## Physical Characteristics

Perennial growing to 2.4m by 0.6m . It is hardy to zone 6 and is not frost tender. It is in flower from July to September, and the seeds ripen from August to October. The flowers are hermaphrodite (have both male and female organs). We rate it 3 out of 5 for usefulness.

The plant prefers light (sandy), medium (loamy) and heavy (clay) soils. The plant prefers acid, neutral and basic (alkaline) soils. It cannot grow in the shade. It requires dry or moist soil.

## Habitats and Possible Locations

Woodland, Cultivated Beds, Sunny Edge, Dappled Shade.

## Edible Uses

*Flowers; Leaves; Root; Stem; Tea.*

Young leaves - raw or cooked[2, 55, 177]. A mild flavour, but the texture leaves something to be desired[K]. They have been used as a pot-herb, though they are not particularly palatable[4]. They can also be chopped up finely and added to salads[K].

Inner portion of young stems - raw[101].

Flower petals and flower buds - raw. Added to salads[183].

A nutritious starch is obtained from the root[183].

A refreshing tea is made from the flower petals[183].

## Medicinal Uses

### Disclaimer

*Antiinflammatory; Astringent; Demulcent; Diuretic; Emollient; Febrifuge.*

The flowers are demulcent, diuretic and emollient[4, 21]. They are useful in the treatment of chest complaints[4], and a decoction is used to improve blood circulation, for the treatment of constipation, dysmenorrhoea, haemorrhage etc[218]. The flowers are harvested when they are open and are dried for later use[238].

The shoots are used to ease a difficult labour[218].

The root is astringent and demulcent[240]. It is crushed and applied as a poultice to ulcers[218]. Internally, it is used in the treatment of dysentery[240].

The roots and the flowers are used in Tibetan medicine, where they are said to have a sweet, acrid taste and a neutral potency[241]. They are used in the treatment of inflammations of the kidneys/womb, vaginal/seminal discharge, and the roots on their own are used to treat loss of appetite[241].

The seed is demulcent, diuretic and febrifuge[240].

## Other Uses

*Compost; Dye; Litmus; Oil; Paper.*

A fibre obtained from the stems is used in papermaking[189]. The fibres are about 1.9mm long. The stems are harvested in late summer, the leaves are removed and the stems are steamed until the fibres can be removed. The fibres are cooked with lye for 2 hours and then ball milled for 3 hours or pounded with mallets. The paper is light tan in colour[189].

The flowers are an alternative ingredient of 'Quick Return' herbal compost activator[32]. This is a dried and powdered mixture of several herbs that can be added to a compost heap in order to speed up bacterial activity and thus shorten the time needed to make the compost[K].

The seed contains 12% of a drying oil[114, 240].

The red anthocyanin constituent of the flowers is used as a litmus[114].

A brown dye is obtained from the petals[168].

## Cultivation details

Succeeds in most soils[1]. Poor soils should be enriched with organic matter[1, 111]. Prefers a heavy rich soil and a sheltered sunny position[200].

Plants are hardy to about -15°C[200].

A very ornamental plant, it is usually grown as a biennial due to its susceptibility to the fungal disease 'rust'[1, 200]. There are many named varieties[238].

Young plants, and also the young growth in spring, are very attractive to slugs[K].

## Propagation

Seed - sow April/May or August/September in pots or in situ[200, 238]. Easily grown from seed, which usually germinates in about 2 - 3 weeks at 20°C[133, 268]. When large enough to handle, prick the seedlings out into individual pots and plant them out in the summer.

Division after flowering. Only use rust-free specimens.

Root cuttings in December.

Basal cuttings at almost any time of year.

## Cultivars

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There are many named forms for this species, but these have been developed for their ornamental value and not for their other uses. Unless you particularly require the special characteristics of any of these cultivars, we would generally recommend that you grow the natural species for its useful properties. We have, therefore, not listed the cultivars in this database[K].

## Web References

- Details of Medicinal Uses, Habitats, etc. in M. Grieve [A Modern Herbal](#) (1931) [4]
- [H] Details of Scandanavian and European Common names in [Henriette's names database](#)
- [E] Ethnobotany Data (common names, uses, countries) from the [Ethnobotany Database](#) (sadly ftp only. The searchable web pages have been pulled).
- [V] [Images](#) from the [Vascular Plant Image Gallery](#) of the Texas A&M Bioinformatics Working Group.
- [B] [Data](#) (Latin & Common names, other references) from the BONAP's [Synonymized Checklist of the Vascular Flora of the United States, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands](#).
- [C] [Taxon data](#). from the [CalFlora database](#).
- [G] [Data](#) (Common Names, Uses, Distribution) from the USDA/ARS NPGS's [GRIN](#) taxonomic database.
- [P] [Data](#). (uses, distribution, wetland) from the [UDSA's plants database](#).
- [HP] [Links, Photos, Suppliers](#) from [Hortiplex Plant Database](#)

References for *Althaea rosea* (a possible synonym).

- [H] Details of Scandinavian and European Common names in [Henriette's names database](#)
- [E] Ethnobotany Data (common names, uses, countries) from the [Ethnobotany Database](#) (sadly ftp only. The searchable web pages have been pulled).
- [M] [Photo](#) from the [Botanical Sorting Mechanism](#).
- [M] [Photo](#) from the [Botanical Sorting Mechanism](#).

References for *alcea rosea* (a possible synonym).

- [HP] [Photo](#) From [Henriette's plant pictures](#)
- [HP] [Photo](#) From [Henriette's plant pictures](#)
- [HP] [Photo](#) From [Henriette's plant pictures](#)

See the [PFAF Links Pages](#) for other sources or the [The Gatherer](#) where you can search many other sources all in one go.

## References

### [K] Ken Fern

Notes from observations, tasting etc at Plants For A Future and on field trips.

[1] **F. Chittendon.** *RHS Dictionary of Plants plus Supplement.* 1956 Oxford University Press 1951

Comprehensive listing of species and how to grow them. Somewhat outdated, it has been replaced in 1992 by a new dictionary (see [200]).

[2] **Hedrick. U. P.** *Sturtevant's Edible Plants of the World.* Dover Publications 1972 ISBN 0-486-20459-6

Lots of entries, quite a lot of information in most entries and references.

[4] **Grieve.** *A Modern Herbal.* Penguin 1984 ISBN 0-14-046-440-9

Not so modern (1930's?) but lots of information, mainly temperate plants.

[17] **Clapham, Tutin and Warburg.** *Flora of the British Isles.* Cambridge University Press 1962

A very comprehensive flora, the standard reference book but it has no pictures.

[21] **Lust. J.** *The Herb Book.* Bantam books 1983 ISBN 0-553-23827-2

Lots of information tightly crammed into a fairly small book.

[32] **Bruce. M. E.** *Commonsense Compost Making.* Faber 1977 ISBN 0-571-09990-4

Excellent little booklet dealing with how to make compost by using herbs to activate the heap. Gives full details of the herbs that are used.

[55] **Harris. B. C.** *Eat the Weeds.* Pivot Health 1973

Interesting reading.

[100] **Polunin. O.** *Flowers of Europe - A Field Guide.* Oxford University Press 1969 ISBN 0192176218

An excellent and well illustrated pocket guide for those with very large pockets. Also gives some details on plant uses.

[101] **Turner. N. J. and Szczawinski. A.** *Edible Wild Fruits and Nuts of Canada*. National Museum of Natural Sciences 1978

A very readable guide to some wild foods of Canada.

[111] **Sanders. T. W.** *Popular Hardy Perennials*. Collingridge 1926

A fairly wide range of perennial plants that can be grown in Britain and how to grow them.

[114] **Chakravarty. H. L.** *The Plant Wealth of Iraq*.

It is surprising how many of these plants can be grown in Britain. A very readable book on the useful plants of Iraq.

[133] **Rice. G. (Editor)** *Growing from Seed. Volume 1*. Thompson and Morgan. 1987

Very readable magazine with lots of information on propagation.

[168] **Grae. I.** *Nature's Colors - Dyes from Plants*. MacMillan Publishing Co. New York. 1974  
ISBN 0-02-544950-8

A very good and readable book on dyeing.

[177] **Kunkel. G.** *Plants for Human Consumption*. Koeltz Scientific Books 1984 ISBN  
3874292169

An excellent book for the dedicated. A comprehensive listing of latin names with a brief list of edible parts.

[183] **Facciola. S.** *Cornucopia - A Source Book of Edible Plants*. Kampong Publications 1990  
ISBN 0-9628087-0-9

Excellent. Contains a very wide range of conventional and unconventional food plants (including tropical) and where they can be obtained (mainly N. American nurseries but also research institutes and a lot of other nurseries from around the world.

[189] **Bell. L. A.** *Plant Fibres for Papermaking*. Liliaceae Press 1988

A good practical section on how to make paper on a small scale plus details of about 75 species (quite a few of them tropical) that can be used.

[200] **Huxley. A.** *The New RHS Dictionary of Gardening. 1992*. MacMillan Press 1992 ISBN 0-333-47494-5

Excellent and very comprehensive, though it contains a number of silly mistakes. Readable yet also very detailed.

[218] **Duke. J. A. and Ayensu. E. S.** *Medicinal Plants of China* Reference Publications, Inc.  
1985 ISBN 0-917256-20-4

Details of over 1,200 medicinal plants of China and brief details of their uses. Often includes an analysis, or at least a list of constituents. Heavy going if you are not into the subject.

[238] **Bown. D.** *Encyclopaedia of Herbs and their Uses*. Dorling Kindersley, London. 1995  
ISBN 0-7513-020-31

A very well presented and informative book on herbs from around the globe. Plenty in it for both the casual reader and the serious student. Just one main quibble is the silly way of having two separate entries for each plant.

[240] **Chopra. R. N., Nayar. S. L. and Chopra. I. C.** *Glossary of Indian Medicinal Plants (Including the Supplement)*. Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, New Delhi. 1986  
Very terse details of medicinal uses of plants with a wide range of references and details of research into the plants chemistry. Not for the casual reader.

[241] **Tsarong. Tsewang. J.** *Tibetan Medicinal Plants* Tibetan Medical Publications, India 1994  
ISBN 81-900489-0-2

A nice little pocket guide to the subject with photographs of 95 species and brief comments on their uses.

[268] **Stuart. M. (Editor)** *The Encyclopedia of Herbs and Herbalism* Orbis Publishing. London. 1979 ISBN 0-85613-067-2

Excellent herbal with good concise information on over 400 herbs.



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