

## About Phlox

Garden phlox seeds require a minimum of 60 days of cold stratification to aid in germination. (Annual phlox varieties do not require this first step.) This can be achieved either outdoors or in the refrigerator. For natural stratification, sow the seeds in late fall or winter in a weed-free area. The cold temperatures help break the seeds out of dormancy, and they will emerge in spring.

Alternatively, for artificial stratification, place the seeds on a damp paper towel, coffee filter, vermiculite, or sand in a sealed plastic bag. Store the bag in the refrigerator at temperatures between 33° to 40° F.

Once ready, phlox seeds germinate and grow rapidly, making direct sowing generally the preferred method. Directly sow your seeds outdoors in fall, if you so choose for garden phlox, or spring when the ground can be worked and the soil is consistently 65°F to 70°F. However, if spring arrives late in your area, you can begin indoors near a sunny window four to six weeks before transplanting. Using growing lights and heat mats can further aid in the successful cultivation of phlox from seed.

## Where to Plant

Phlox thrives in sunny locations but appreciates some afternoon shade, especially in hot climates. When grown in ceramic containers, which absorb heat, it's advisable to position potted phlox where they can avoid direct sunlight during the late afternoon.

No need to worry excessively about soil quality. Phlox flourishes in soils ranging from poor to medium quality, as long as they are moist, yet well-draining.

Garden phlox is suitable for the back or middle of a border, while annuals phlox varieties shine at the front.

## How to Plant

When direct sowing, cover seed with  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch fine soil. Darkness is required for germination. Thin seedlings when first true leaves appear. If started indoors, begin the hardening off process after all danger of frost has passed and carefully transplant your seedlings to their outdoor location when first true leaves appear.

In drier locations, plant or thin phlox one foot apart. In humid or consistently irrigated beds, phlox should be spaced two feet apart.

## Caring for Phlox

Ensure your planting beds remain consistently moist by using a mist sprayer or setting your hose to a gentle flow. Once the plants have developed a few pairs of true leaves, you can reduce watering unless the specific phlox variety necessitates otherwise.

Phlox gradually develops into sizable clumps in the garden. To ensure healthy growth and prevent overcrowding, divide the plant every three or four years, preferably in early spring, spacing the clumps around 24 inches apart. Indicators that division is necessary include reduced flowering and a sparse center.

For gardens with poor soil, consider fertilizing annually in spring. Deadheading immediately after flowering will encourage additional flower production. In autumn or winter, trim your plant down to ground level once the foliage has withered.