

## Auricula care notes

Auriculas are easy to please and will give years of pleasure providing you are aware of their simple needs:

They like to be cool. Fully hardy, they will cope with cold winter temperatures but not like being too hot in summer. So, whether you grow in pots or the border, choose a cool spot with some part shade from the mid day summer sun.

They like some moisture, but not too much. Your compost or garden soil will need good drainage. In the garden a good loam which drains freely but does not dry out completely is ideal. Everyone has difficulty with the commonly used terms 'moist but well drained'. The plants just need to drink a little when active but not drown.

A little food is good but not too much. When your plants arrive from us there will be sufficient slow release fertilizer in the compost to keep them going, but when they start into growth in early spring a dilute liquid feed will give them a boost. Too much and leafy growth may be too lush and detrimental to flowering.

### Where to grow:

Although they will happily grow in the garden, most look at their best when on display and can be seen at eye level. If choosing plants specifically for a garden border then start with the **border auriculas**. Bred for this purpose they will be vigorous and happy forming neat clumps. The colours may be more muted but that is all to the good in a garden setting. While **alpine auriculas** will also be happy in the open garden they will need regular dividing to avoid the growth of offsets impairing flowering.

**Double auriculas** are vigorous and easy to grow but, as with some of the new breeds of double rose, the heads tend to flop with the first drop of rain.

Our preference is to grow in pots where the plants can be admired close up. Little protection is needed, other than to keep the rain off in winter. A cool greenhouse or cold frame is a luxury, but any spot out of the winter rain can be used. Open porches and sheltered window ledges can give enough protection and the latter can make a useful spot for display.

### Compost:

There are probably as many mixes as auricula growers. We choose a mix that is free draining but with enough substance to keep them happy through the season without too much attention:

3 parts peat based compost with slow release fertilizer

1 part John Innes no 2

1 part horticultural grit

If this seems too complex then a proprietary multi-purpose compost with 20% grit added will suffice. In this case a weak liquid feed in spring and early autumn is a good idea.

### Re-potting:

Plants should be re-potted every year. Our plants will have been freshly potted in early autumn unless purchased before splitting. They can either be grown on in slightly larger pots or divided. Remember that too many side offsets left on the plant may result in poorer flowering (other than the borders) so even if you are not interested in propagation it is best that some be removed. If these come away with roots then they can also be potted and grown on to share or increase your display.

### Watering:

The hardest thing to get right, but you are more likely to kill plants by over than under-watering. Very little watering will be needed in winter while the plants are dormant although they should not be allowed to get dust dry. Remember that in Summer plants may wilt from the heat without being too dry. From late January/February plants will start to grow and watering will be required through Spring to early Summer. A second period of growth occurs in Autumn again requiring more water. Avoid watering on days when frost is imminent. Hard to judge but if in doubt leave! Always water fully but infrequently rather than in dribbles.