



WRITING SAMPLE

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Buttercup Picotee Flower Bulbs

By Gretchen Heber

Buttercup picotee is a particularly attractive cultivar of Persian buttercup (*Ranunculus asiaticus*) that flaunts multi-layered ruffled petals in pink, salmon, yellow, orange, white and red. Gardeners favor these showy blossoms, which thrive in U.S. Department of Agriculture plant hardiness zones 8 through 12, for containers, beds, borders and as cut flowers. These sun-loving plants propagate via bulbs, which are easy to plant.

Planting

Larger bulbs are more expensive but will produce more flowers, so look for bulbs that are about 3 inches across. Bulbs can be planted outdoors in April in USDA zones 6 and 7, or in mid-May in USDA zones 4 and 5. Gardeners living in milder zones, such as 8 to 11, can plant the bulbs in autumn for a spring bloom. When choosing a location for these plants, keep in mind that all parts of buttercup picotee are poisonous if ingested. Dig holes to a depth that are about two to three times the bulb's width, and 3 to 8 inches apart. Set the buttercup picotee bulb in the hole with the roots pointed down, and cover with dirt. Top with a 2- to 3-inch layer of mulch.

Watering

To help settle the soil around the bulbs, you'll want to water them after planting them. Water also provides needed moisture for the bulbs to begin rooting -- especially important for fall-planted bulbs, which must root before cold weather sets in. Avoid overwatering at planting time since this can result in bulb rot. Water with drip irrigation to keep water off the flowers, since the tissue-paper-thin blooms are delicate. Through the bud, bloom and early foliage stage, the bulbs need about 1 inch of water per week.

Cut Flowers

In addition to their visual interest in the garden interest, buttercup picotee flowers have another benefit: they make lovely indoor flower arrangements, lasting about seven days after cutting. Cut long stems when flowers first show color, just before they fully bloom. It's best to cut the flowers early in the morning after a night of absorbing moisture. Place the cut stems in fresh water, and add floral preservative to the water to get a few extra days out of the flowers.

Digging and Storing

Once the foliage dies back or matures in the late spring or early summer, the bulb is dormant. Some gardeners choose to dig up their bulbs for winter storage, and most experts agree Buttercup picotee is a good candidate for this process. Carefully dig up your bulbs and gently wash off dirt. Spread the washed bulbs in a shaded place to dry. When dry, store them at 50 to 55 degrees Fahrenheit in hanging paper bags or on screen-bottom racks away from sunlight.