**Red Hibiscus**

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Growing hibiscus is an easy way to add exotic allure to your garden.

There are two main types of hibiscus: Perennial hibiscus (multiple species) grow like shrubs, but die back to the ground each winter.

Tropical hibiscus (Hibiscus rosa-sinensis) make excellent container plants for poolscapes or patios during the summer, but have to be brought indoors during the winter in all but the warmest areas. Both types have large, colorful flowers, but tropical hibiscus tends to bloom longer than perennial hibiscus.

**How to Choose Hibiscus**

Tropical hibiscus and perennial hibiscus both put on a big show in the garden. Tropical hibiscus plants are what you think of when you picture lazing by the pool in Florida. They have dark green (sometimes glossy) leaves and pink, yellow, orange, lavender, red, white, or bi-color flowers. They grow well in full sun and can only survive outdoors in the winter in zones 10-12. In cooler areas they make great container plants, and are sometimes available as “standards,” or little hibiscus “trees.”

Perennial hibiscus plants can survive the winter in zones 4 to 9. They typically have larger flowers and lighter green leaves, but the bloom size and leaf color vary greatly from species to species. Some plants can grow to be quite large (up to 7 to 8 feet tall). Perennial hibiscus blooms in mid to late summer. Flowers are typically white, pink, lavender, red, or burgundy. If you have a smaller garden, look for a dwarf variety.

## Where to Plant Hibiscus

All hibiscus plants grow best in full sun. Tropical hibiscus needs moist but well-drained soil. Perennial hibiscus grows best in moist soil that never completely dries out (this type can handle a bit more water than tropical hibiscus). If you have a low spot in the garden, perennial hibiscus is an excellent bet for mid- to late-season color.

## When to Plant Hibiscus

Tropical hibiscus is a warm weather plant. Keep it inside until nighttime temperatures are consistently above 50 degrees. Plant perennial hibiscus plants in the spring so that they have an entire growing season to establish a good root system. A perennial hibiscus planted in the fall might not return as reliably the next spring as one planted earlier in the year.

## How to Plant Hibiscus

To plant perennial hibiscus, dig a hole that is twice as wide and just as deep as the plant’s root system. Remove the plant from its plastic pot and settle it into the planting hole. Fill in around the root ball with a 50:50 mixture of the soil you removed and a garden soil for flowers to grow bigger plants with more blooms (vs. unfed plants).

To plant tropical hibiscus, select a container no more than twice as wide as the plant’s root ball. Fill the container 1/3 of the way with potting mix, which helps protect from both overwatering and underwatering, and set the plant in the container so that the top of the root ball is about 1 inch below the lip of the container. Fill in around the root ball with more potting mix.

For both types, water well after planting.

**How to Water Hibiscus**

All hibiscus plants need to be watered thoroughly every couple of days for the first few weeks after planting. After that, water perennial hibiscus twice weekly for the first growing season. During the second growing season and beyond, water once per week unless it rains several days in a row. It’s almost impossible to overwater these plants.

Tropical hibiscus plants should be kept consistently moist, so water whenever the top inch of soil is dry. (Stick your finger in the soil to check.) Containers may need to be watered 3 to 4 times weekly at the beginning of the summer and daily toward the end of the summer as the plants grow. The amount of watering you have to do will be less in cooler months.

**How to Feed Hibiscus**

Beginning a month after planting, feed hibiscus regularly with Flower Food. You can also mix the food in a watering can instead if you prefer. Either way, be sure to follow label directions.

## How to Prune Hibiscus

Keep plants tidy by snapping off flowers immediately after they fade. That will also encourage plants to continue pumping out blooms. Prune up to 1/3 of tropical hibiscus plants to control their size and shape during the summer when plants are actively growing.

Perennial hibiscus plants have different pruning requirements. Wait until new sprouts emerge from the soil in the spring before you cut back the stalks from the previous year’s growth. To encourage a large second flush of blooms during the summer, cut the new plants back by 1/3 after the first bloom. Do not cut plants back to the ground during the winter.

## How to Overwinter Tropical Hibiscus Indoors

Gardeners in cooler climates will have to bring tropical hibiscus plants indoors during the winter. Before doing so, trim each plant back by about 1/3. Thoroughly wash off the stems and leaves to remove any lingering insect pests, then place plants in a warm location with lots of indirect light. This is a rest period for the plants, so allow the soil to almost fully dry out between waterings and fertilize only once per month during the winter. Plants will likely drop their leaves. This is normal, and they will eventually grow out again.