

# Poppies: Modern and Heirloom Varieties in Every Color and Form

Of all the old-fashioned flowers that welcome the summer season, poppies are the most brilliant—they glow like stained glass when the sun shines behind them in early morning or late afternoon. Although their silky petals look delicate nodding on their wispy stems, poppies are both easy to grow and surprisingly hardy.

Cultivated since ancient times for their beautiful blossoms, edible seeds or as medicine, poppies appear in mythology, poetry, and paintings, symbolizing everything from fertility and decadence to blood and memory. Recent breeding developments have further enlarged the range of their form and fantastic diversity of colors.

While many people love the wild form of cheerful yellow-orange California poppies, Renee's Garden offers this species in a palette of multicolored shades, including vivid tropical colors and lovely pastel shades. Shirley poppies, also called the Corn poppies, are mostly single and red in the wild, now come in doubles of pink, salmon, white, and even lilac. Not nearly enough gardeners have experienced the giant peony-like and fringed balls ranging from white to dark maroon in the French Flounce mixture, or the ethereal pale pink/lilac of Hungarian Breadseed poppies or the vivid hues of Heirloom Pepperbox.

Poppies grow best in moderately rich, well-drained soil, and can either be sown in fall or early spring, depending on your climate. In cold winter areas, where the ground freezes hard, plant seeds in spring as soon as the soil can be worked; in mild winter areas, you can make two sowings, the first in late September to early November, and the second in early spring.

Sow seeds directly in the ground rather than in pots, since they form taproots and don't react well to being moved. Scatter them thinly and press them lightly into the soil with the back of a rake but do not cover them, since they need some light to germinate well. Water with a gentle mist spray so that the tiny seeds don't wash away.

Since slugs and snails can consume your entire stand of seedlings in a maddeningly short time, apply snail bait around the poppy patch after sowing. It's very important to thin seedlings to a final spacing of 8-10" for tall poppies, 6-10" for CA poppies. Properly thinned seedlings will have room to form beautiful big plants with many more flowers, while crowded plants will stay spindly and not produce as many blooms.

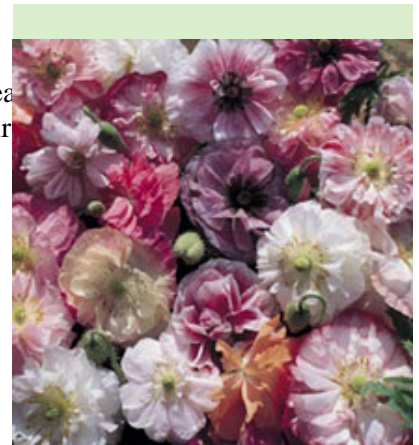
To enjoy poppies as cut flowers, snip the stems just when the buds are about to burst open. For longer vase life, seal the stems by burning the cut stem ends with a lighter before immersing them in water. California poppies are particularly well suited to cutting since they last longer in the vase than other annual poppies.

Renee's garden offers a growing selection of poppies, representing the most reliable and beautiful of the modern and heirloom varieties available in the seed trade:

## Shirley or Corn Poppies, *Papaver rhoeas*:



[Angel's Choir](#) A celebration of the entire range of genetic diversity within the *Papaver rhoeas* species, Angel's Choir contains fully double, semi-double and single flowers with many bicolors. Not



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[French Flounce](#) [Heirloom](#)  
[Pepperbox](#)  
[Hungarian Breadseed](#)  
[Native Orange](#) [Legion of Honor](#)  
[Shirley poppy](#)  
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only do we see pastel pink, apricot, peach, cream, salmon and rose, but also rare cooler colors such as dove-gray and lavender.

**Shirley poppy:** An heirloom mixture of semi-double and single pale pink, white, rose pink, salmon, and scarlet, many with a white edge, it was introduced in 1880 by William Wilkes, an English vicar. On a walk near his home, he noticed a poppy with a white edge, saved the seed, and carefully pulled out plain red ones until he'd developed a range of pastel colors "with a wonderfully light, bright tissue paper-like appearance".



**Legion of Honor Poppy:** These are the wild red corn poppies, immortalized in Canadian John McRae's poem written during World War I: "In Flanders' Fields the poppies blow, between the crosses row on row". The poppies that seeded themselves profusely in the trenched fields of the Western Front became symbolic of the blood of the many thousands of brave soldiers who died there and the sadness of war. In England after WWI, a factory opened for the production of artificial red poppies, which were worn in honor of the fallen troops on Poppy, or Remembrance Sunday—a custom that continues today. It's easy to see why poppies became so beloved as a metaphor: their simple elegance lends dignity to the sacrifices of war.

### **Papaver somniferum varieties:**

While the corn poppy represents memory, the opium poppy, or papaver somniferum has a long history of use as a narcotic. Special varieties for opium and morphine production contain an especially high percentage of alkaloids, but gardeners have grown other ornamental, seed, and oil production varieties for hundreds of years. Under U.S. law, it is illegal to grow any of the varieties within this species; however, it is legal to sell the seeds and eat poppy seed bagels or muffins. Since they are such beautiful garden flowers, Renee's Garden continues to offer the seeds of the following two varieties for sale, but if you are concerned about possible legal consequences, grow papaver rhoeas varieties instead.



**French Flounce:** These gigantic ruffled and fringed puffs remind me of the swirling skirts of dancers at the 19th century Moulin Rouge. There are so many surprises within this fully double mix of peony and carnation poppies. My daughter and I grew them last year, and looked forward to going outside every morning to witness the unfolding new forms that would magically appear. The color range includes scarlet, pink, salmon, violet, purple and deep wine red. At Renee's Garden, we grew them in a bed with other old-fashioned annuals like larkspur and cornflowers in a faraway spot behind the vegetable garden, but they always attracted immediate attention.

**Hungarian Breadseed** poppy was developed for its large capsules, each containing thousands of crunchy black seeds. Hungary and other Central European bakers are famous for poppy seed cake, and poppy seed glazed yeasted breads. Even if you decide not to eat the seeds, the pastel, lilac-pink flowers look like fairy wings flying between perennials at the back of a border. When they dry, collect the capsules and wind them into wreaths with dried herbs and everlasting flowers. Be sure to leave some capsules on the plants to self-sow for next year.



**Heirloom Pepperbox** offers triple rewards: glorious flowers, handsome pods and nutty-tasting seeds from the same ornamental plants. The 3 to 4 foot tall gray-green plants send up nodding stems of large papery-textured blossoms in rich purple, vivid red and pale lilac-pink, all with dark center blotches. After the petals drop, the seed pods swell as the abundant blue-black seeds mature. Harvest when dry, shake out the tasty seeds for cooking and baking and keep the pods for beautiful decorations.

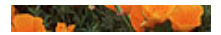
### **California Poppies, Eschscholzia californica**

#### **Native Orange**

The classic California poppy whose fluted form and exuberant golden-orange color truly celebrate spring. A perfect choice for hot and dry areas, they'll grow easily without fuss all over the country. The silky, vivid flowers shine above mounds of feathery foliage for weeks, covering the ground with



a cloak of bright flowers. Carefree and cheerful, these native orange poppies are perfect to cover a neglected area or hard to cultivate slope or plant in the garden for a memorable display of glowing color.



### [Tropical Sunset](#)

Renee made up this knockout color blend that features her favorites of the wonderfully vivid newer California poppy shades. It really looks like a blazing sunset with rich hues of deep red, carmine rose, vanilla, as well as ruffled flame and tangerine bicolors. California poppies last longer in the garden than other annual poppies, and readily self sow, and so you can have these carefree flowers every

season

### [Tequila Sunrise](#)

Plant this combination of mandarin red and cream California poppies at the base of tropical-looking flowers or bulbs— or use it to light up the greens at the edge of a vegetable garden.

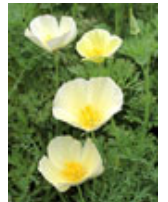


### [Dusky Rose](#)

This pretty and unusual California poppy color selection has silky, deep rose-tinted blossoms that glow with iridescent color. For weeks in spring, the paper-thin flowers float on slender stems above mounded plants with feathery grey-green foliage.

### [Buttercream](#)

By careful reselection over numerous years, breeders have been able to isolate this silky-soft, buttercream color in California poppies. The soft creamy colored flowers nod the in the wind and shine for weeks above mounded plants, contrasting handsomely with the blue-green foliage.



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email: [customerservice@reeneesgarden.com](mailto:customerservice@reeneesgarden.com)

Renee's Garden Seeds 6060A Graham Hill Rd. Felton, CA 95018

Ph. 1-888-880-7228 Fax 1-831-335-7227 [www.reeneesgarden.com](http://www.reeneesgarden.com)