

Shamrocks

Oxalis



Oxalis (Shamrocks) are among the best of the indoor bulb plants. Not only are they easy to find grow, they have a long bloom period and come in a variety of colors, including pink, white, yellow, red, and purple.

BLOOMING

Oxalis pes-caprae, sometimes called the Bermuda Buttercup though it is native to South Africa, is an especially nice yellow variety. Oxalis plants have rather slender flower stems and fairly low-growing foliage that looks like enormous clover leaves.

Oxalis plants can be brought into bloom anytime from fall through spring. They need to rest through the summer. Pot the bulbs in succession from September to March, setting them 1 inch deep in a mix of equal parts peat moss, packaged soil, and either sand or perlite, with a dusting of ground limestone added. The plants are small and look better in a group, so set 6 bulbs together in a shallow 6-inch pan.

Once they are planted, moisten the soil and set the pot into the sun. If Shamrocks don't have at least half days of sunshine, they are very disappointing plants because their growth is so weak. Their leaves and blooms are sensitive to light and only open on sunny days. During darkness or cloudy weather the flowers close and leaves fold up.

PLANT CARE

Within 2 weeks of potting, there is a healthy show of foliage from the bulbs, and flowers within a month. The flowers will last for about 2 months. During this growing period, the plants need night temperatures in the 50's, constantly moist soil, and a monthly feeding. At the end of the bloom period, when the flowers fade and the foliage starts to turn yellow, gradually reduce the amount of water and eliminate fertilizer altogether.

Leave bulbs in their pots until fall when they can be repotted and planted again. Take some care during this replanting operation. The bulbs will have produced a pot full of small bulblets, and even the tiniest of them – no larger than the head of a corsage pin – will produce a small plant and some flowers. Eventually all those little bulbs will grow to full size. So, sift through the soil carefully, plant all the bulbs, and you'll never need to buy another oxalis bulb.

In warmer climates or well-mulched areas protected from the cold, Shamrocks may do OK planted outside.

