



Cooperative Extension Service
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

Catharanthus roseus¹

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Introduction

Also known as *Vinca rosea*, *Vinca multiflora*, Vinca grows 7 to 24 inches high and wide, forming a mound of colorful flowers in white, pink, or rosy-purple on brittle stems (Fig. 1). Cultivars are available with carpet-like or upright habits. Flowering is prolific throughout the warm months, although plants may establish poorly in very hot weather. The plant tolerates heat, and flowers in the hottest weather, probably better than most other flowering ground covers. Spaced 12 to 20 inches apart, plants will form a solid mass of mounded foliage and flowers 6 to 8-weeks after sowing seed, provided they are fertilized, watered lightly (or not at all), and planted in full sun.

General Information

Scientific name: *Catharanthus roseus*

Pronunciation: kath-uh-RANTH-us ROE-zee-us

Common name(s): Periwinkle, Vinca, Madagascar Periwinkle

Family: *Apocynaceae*

Plant type: annual; perennial; herbaceous; ground cover

USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Planting month for zone 7: Jun

Planting month for zone 8: May; Jun

Planting month for zone 9: Apr; May; Jun; Sep; Oct

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: Feb; Mar; Apr; May; Sep; Oct; Nov; Dec

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: edging; ground cover; mass planting; naturalizing; hanging basket; cascading down a wall; border

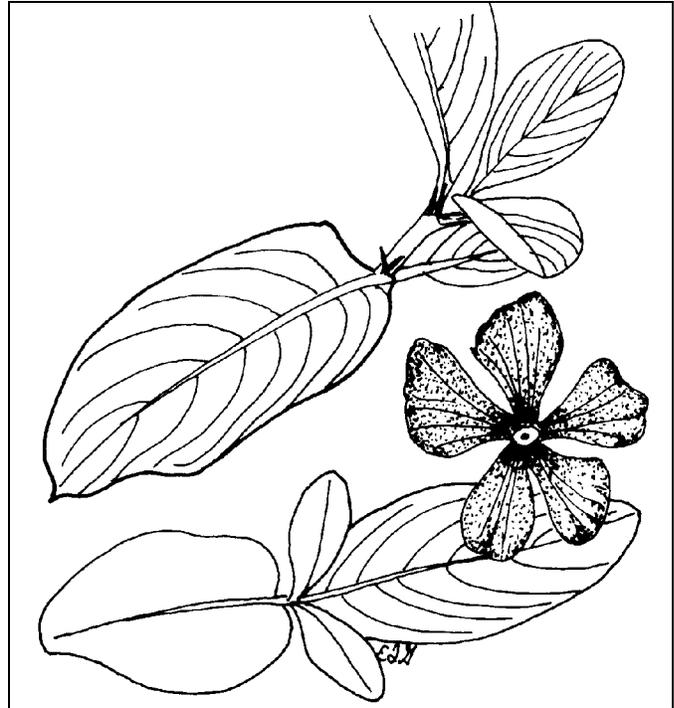


Figure 1. Periwinkle.

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

Description

Height: 1 to 2 feet

Spread: 1 to 2 feet

Plant habit: round

Plant density: moderate

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: elliptic (oval)

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: not applicable

Fall characteristic: not applicable

Flower

Flower color: pink; purple; lavender

Flower characteristic: year-round flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: pod or pod-like

Fruit length: .5 to 1 inch

Fruit cover: dry or hard

Fruit color: green

Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: not applicable

Current year stem/twig color: green

Current year stem/twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun

Soil tolerances: clay; sand; acidic; slightly alkaline; loam

Drought tolerance: high

Soil salt tolerances: unknown

Plant spacing: 12 to 18 inches

Other

Roots: not applicable

Winter interest: plant has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers

Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding

Invasive potential: may self-seed each year

Pest resistance: very sensitive to one or more pests or diseases which can affect plant health or aesthetics

plants farther apart in subsequent plantings. Remove infected plants.

Canker and dieback cause the shoot tip to become dark brown, wilt, and die back to the soil surface. The disease is most common during rainy weather. Infected plants should be discarded.

Several fungi cause leaf spots on Periwinkle but they are usually harmless.

Use and Management

Periwinkle will cascade over a wall or container and makes a nice hanging basket. Derivatives from Periwinkle are used in a variety of medicines and treatments for human ailments including leukemia and hodgkins disease. Plants seed themselves into the landscape.

The plant requires full sun and has a long growing period. Periwinkle likes to be kept on the dry side and the roots will rot if irrigated too frequently. It is best not to irrigate periwinkle more than two or three times after it is planted. Once summer rains begin, plants often succumb to root rot diseases from too much water. A bed of periwinkle looks great until this time, but it should usually be considered a short lived annual. A three month period of color without disease is considered very good. Once plants are removed, plant with another annual to finish the season. Some horticulturists have success growing periwinkle on a raised bed comprised of sand or other very well-drained soil.

Propagation is by seed or cuttings. Softwood cuttings can be taken and rooted during summer. The seed germinates in one week at a temperature of 70 to 75-degrees F. Keep the flat of seeds in the dark until the seed germinates and don't over-water. Planting may be done at any time during the year in USDA hardiness zones 10 and 11.

There are a variety of cultivars available for flower color and plant size. The 'Carpet' and 'Little' Series grow to no more than 12 inches tall. They too are sensitive to root disease.

No pests are of major concern.

Pests and Diseases

Root rots regularly cause decay of roots and lower stems.

Fusarium wilt can cause plant death.

Blight causes brown or black spots which extend inward from the leaf edge and eventually cover the whole leaf. Space