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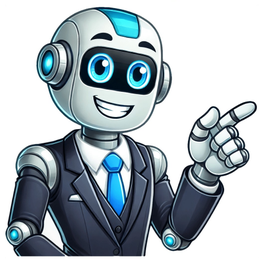

It pains me to admit that I dislike certain native plants, but with a little research, many redeem themselves. This was the case for the unruly Jerusalem Artichoke (a useful food product!) and is also true with this week's native flower: Common Evening Primrose (Oenothera biennis). Common Evening Primrose is an eastern native biennial flower with a bad habit: it reseeds freely and has become an invasive plant in other parts of the world. In fact, its seeds are so successful that they appear in nearly every state and province in the U.S. and Canada. Common Evening Primrose loves a dry, sunny habitat, and makes its home in disturbed sites, regularly popping up in fields and ditches. This is not a plant you need to buy—it just shows up. And, as a seed-throwing biennial, it relocates itself. The first year, it forms a basal rosette and doesn't flower. In year two, it reaches a spindly 6 feet tall, flowers, produces hundreds of seeds, and dies. The following season, new plants start over as basal rosettes. While Evening Primrose may seem like a perennial, you are instead seeing a combination of plants in the basal rosette and flowering stages growing in proximity year after year. What's to Like about Common Evening Primrose? Common Evening Primrose blooms at night and is pollinated by night-owl moths and early-riser bees. It is also a larval host for the Primrose Moth. Songbirds collect the seeds. You may be wondering: Other than being pollinator-friendly, why appreciate Evening Primrose? Like the aforementioned Jerusalem Artichoke, it was a food source for indigenous Americans like the Iroquois, Cherokee, and Gosiute. The whole plant is edible: leaves, roots, and seeds. Perhaps most importantly, it contains essential omega-6 fatty acids. It was also used medicinally to treat many ailments, from "piles" to laziness. Don't we all occasionally wish to cure laziness? It is still used in natural medicine, though its efficacy is suspect. By the way, if you're looking for a well-behaved, low-growing, night-blooming primrose, give perennial Missouri Evening Primrose a try—same genus, different outcome. Evening primrose, also known as Oenothera, is a perennial plant. As a gardening and landscaping expert, I have encountered evening primrose in various gardens and landscapes, and its status as a perennial is well-established. However, it is worth noting that there are different species of evening primrose, and their specific growth habits and lifespans may vary slightly. One popular species of evening primrose is the tufted evening-primrose (Oenothera caespitosa). This particular variety is a low-growing, stemless perennial that adds charm and beauty to any garden. Its gray-green fuzzy leaves give it a unique texture, while the stunning 3-4 inch white flowers add a touch of elegance. One of the fascinating characteristics of evening primrose is its flowering pattern. The flowers of tufted evening-primrose open in the evening, releasing a delightful fragrance that attracts pollinators such as moths and nocturnal insects. However, as the mid-day heat intensifies, these flowers gradually close, preserving their beauty and protecting themselves from the scorching sun. In terms of maintenance, evening primrose is relatively easy to care for once established. It prefers full sun to partial shade and well-drained soil. It is also drought-tolerant, making it suitable for gardens with dry conditions. However, it is essential to provide regular watering during its initial growth period to help establish strong roots. Propagation of evening primrose can be done through seeds or division. If you choose to grow it from seeds, it is best to sow them in the spring or fall. The seeds require light for germination, so a light covering of soil or simply pressing them gently into the soil surface is sufficient. Once the plants are established, they can self-seed and spread, creating a beautiful display in your garden. Evening primrose is a versatile plant that can be used in various garden styles. Its low-growing habit makes it suitable for borders, rock gardens, or even as a ground cover. The delicate white flowers also complement other colorful blooms, adding contrast and interest to flower beds. In my experience, evening primrose is not only a visually appealing plant but also a valuable addition to any garden ecosystem. Its fragrant flowers attract beneficial insects and pollinators, contributing to the overall biodiversity of the area. Additionally, the fuzzy leaves can provide visual interest and texture, adding depth and diversity to your landscape design. To summarize, evening primrose, specifically the tufted evening-primrose species, is a perennial plant that offers unique characteristics and beauty to any garden. Its low-growing, stemless habit, gray-green fuzzy leaves, and fragrant white flowers make it an enchanting addition. With proper care and maintenance, this plant can thrive and bring joy to both gardeners and nature enthusiasts alike. Evening primrose (Oenothera biennis) is a beautiful wildflower that grows across much of North America. Its bright yellow flowers bloom in the evening, giving it its common name. Evening primrose is an interesting plant that has some unique characteristics. One question that often comes up is, is evening primrose a perennial? Let's take a closer look at this plant to understand its life cycle. The Life Cycle of Evening Primrose Evening primrose is technically a biennial plant. This means it takes two years to complete its life cycle. In the first year, evening primrose grows only a rosette of leaves at ground level. It does not produce any flowers in the first year. The plant simply focuses on establishing a healthy root system and storing energy through photosynthesis in its leaves. In the second year, evening primrose sends up a tall flowering stalk from 3-5 feet tall. Starting in early summer beautiful yellow flowers begin blooming on this stalk and continue blooming for several weeks or months. After flowering finishes, the plant forms seed pods and dies back entirely to the ground by winter. Does Evening Primrose Come Back Every Year? Because evening primrose dies after flowering in its second year it does not behave as a traditional perennial that persists for many years. However evening primrose has a sneaky strategy that allows it to return to the same spot year after year. As the flowers fade in late summer, evening primrose forms seed pods filled with dozens of seeds. These seeds drop to the ground as the pods split open. With bare ground contact, many of the seeds will germinate the following spring. This gives the appearance of evening primrose coming back in the same location every year. In reality, it is new seedlings emerging from the previous year's seed crop. But the end result is evening primrose self-sowing and naturalizing in an area over many years. Managing Evening Primrose in Gardens The fact that evening primrose self-sows so freely makes it a great wildflower for naturalized areas and meadow gardens. However, some gardeners view evening primrose as weedy or invasive because of how easily it spreads via seed. Here are a few tips for managing evening primrose in cultivated gardens: Plant in an out-of-the-way spot where its spread will be contained. Cut off spent flower heads before they form seed pods to prevent self-sowing. Pull out first year rosettes in spring to control spread. Grow evening primrose in containers instead of planting in garden beds. Unique Properties of Evening Primrose In addition to its beautiful flowers, evening primrose has some special properties that add to its appeal: Flowers attract moths, bats, and other nocturnal pollinators Leaves and roots are edible and high in omega fatty acids Oil from seeds has medicinal benefits Native American tribes used the plant for food and medicine So in addition to ornamental uses in gardens, evening primrose has a history of providing food and natural remedies. Modern research has confirmed the plant's high nutrient content and beneficial phytochemicals. While not a true perennial, evening primrose has found great success across North America by self-sowing from one year to the next. This biennial wildflower naturalizes easily to provide years of beauty with very little care needed. Just beware of its spreading habit and manage growth to keep it contained. With its edible parts, medicinal benefits, and night-blooming flowers, evening primrose is a special plant indeed. Description10″ tall x 18″ wide (seed propagated). A heat loving plant that thrives in sunny, dry areas along baking south and west facing walls and pavement areas. Spreading rapidly on shallow roots when the hot summer weather arrives, give this beauty plenty of room to grow as it will overrun smaller, less vigorous plants. Preferring unimproved, well-drained soils, this plant requires little extra water once established. Not generally recommended for gardeners living in cold, short season climates. Zone Shipping Status Zone 2 Shipping begins the week of May 12th, 2025 Zone 3 Shipping begins the week of May 12th, 2025 Zone 4 Shipping begins the week of May 12th, 2025 Zone 5 Shipping begins the week of April 28th, 2025 Zone 6 Shipping begins the week of April 14th, 2025 Zone 7 Shipping begins the week of March 31st, 2025 Zone 8 Now Shipping Zone 9 Now Shipping Zone 10 Now Shipping Together, we're improving the earth, one garden at a time Learn all about evening primrose! FAQ Does evening primrose come back every year? It is a biennial, meaning that it lives for two years and only blooms during the second year, but will readily self-seed and come back from seed year after year. For the first year, common evening primrose produces a rosette of leaves and puts most of its energy into establishing its root system. Do evening primroses like sun or shade? Evening primrose thrives in a sunny location that receives at least 6 to 8 hours of direct sun a day. The plants are not fussy about soil type and will grow and spread in even poor sandy soil. What to do with evening primroses after flowering? Water the soil in dry periods during the growing season, and remove faded flowers and leaves as and when you need to. Towards the end of their flowering period, leave some flowers on the plant to set seed, and either collect seed to resow or let them self-seed naturally around the garden. Should evening primrose be cut back? It is quite safe to mow the patch back to the ground whenever the plants become too leggy.Jun 28, 2011 Is evening primrose a perennial? Common evening primrose (Oenothera biennis), the most well-known of the bunch, grows as an herbaceous biennial in fields, thickets, glades, and prairies across USDA Hardiness Zones 3-9. Still, other varieties grow abundantly across the country, like Northern evening primrose (Oenothera parviflora) and showy evening primrose (Oenothera speciosa). Can evening primrose grow in the UK? All you need to know about growing the evening primrose wildflower, in our Grow Guide. Evening primrose relates to several plants in the Oenothera genus. There are many varieties worldwide but the most common in the UK is Oenothera biennis, a biennial plant native to North America, which has naturalised here in the UK. Does evening primrose bloom in the morning? Evening Primrose (Oenothera biennis) is a biennial plant best known for its bright yellow flowers that bloom in the evening and close by morning. The plant grows a rosette of leaves in its first year, followed by tall flower stalks in the second year. Can evening primrose grow in shade? Evening primrose is one of the easiest plants you can grow in your garden. It prefers full sun but can grow in slight shade too. The biggest factor is to make sure it's planted where the soil is well-draining. You should aim to provide the highest quality soil possible, but this plant is so versatile it can even grow in subpar soil. Are evening primrose plants hard to care for? Pollinator Gardens – Since these flowers attract nighttime pollinators like moths, plant them in a pollinator garden with other butterfly and bee-friendly plants. Whilst evening primrose plants are generally pretty tough, but they can face a few issues: Root rot is typically the most common plant care issue. What does an evening primrose plant look like? In their first year, your evening primrose plants will form a leafy rosette of long, lance-shaped green leaves, often with a reddish tint. In their second year they will form a flower stem, from which large, bowl-shaped yellow flowers will grow. Evening primrose plants require very little care. Evening primrose flowers in a border. Getty ImagesEvening primrose can grow to an average height of around 1m, so plant it towards the middle or back of your border, in full sun to partial shade, and in moist but well-drained soil.Planting evening primrose plantsThe best way to grow evening primrose is from seed. Sow evening primrose seed in late autumn or early spring, in pots or direct where you want them to grow. If growing in pots, make sure you plant the young plants out in their first year, as they are biennial (flower in the second year) and have a long taproot, which can be damaged when planting out in the second year.In their first year, your evening primrose plants will form a leafy rosette of long, lance-shaped green leaves, often with a reddish tint. In their second year they will form a flower stem, from which large, bowl-shaped yellow flowers will grow.Evening primrose plants require very little care. Water the soil in dry periods during the growing season, and remove faded flowers and leaves as and when you need to. Towards the end of their flowering period, leave some flowers on the plant to set seed, and either collect seed to resow or let them self-seed naturally around the garden.Evening primrose is not troubled by many pests although young plants may suffer slug and snail damage. Also be mindful of root rot, which can occur in moist soils – free-draining soil is essential for this species.Evening primrose, Oenothera odorata 'Apricot Delight'Flowers age from pale yellow to apricot and then coral pink. Height x Spread: 1m x 40cmBuy Oenothera 'Apricot Delight' from SuttonsSoft yellow flowers with a beautiful evening fragrance. H x S: 1m x 60cmBuy Oenothera 'Lemon Sunset' from Thompson & MorganAdvice on buying evening primrose Most evening primrose is available to buy from seed but you may be able to buy plugs or young plants If buying plugs, plant them out straight away as their rootball may be damaged Always check plants for signs of pests or diseases Where to buy evening primrose Thompson & Morgan Suttons Crocus Evening primrose (Oenothera spp.) features cupped flowers in sunny yellows, moony whites, and soft pinks. It is part of a family of flowering plants—many native to North America—that behave as perennials, biennials, or annuals, depending on the variety and climate. Common evening primrose (Oenothera biennis), the most well-known of the bunch, grows as an herbaceous biennial in fields, thickets, glades, and prairies across USDA Hardiness Zones 3-9. Still, other varieties grow abundantly across the country, like Northern evening primrose (Oenothera parviflora) and showy evening primrose (Oenothera speciosa). Some varieties of evening primrose feature a heady citrus scent with a touch of spice, while other blooms are more reminiscent of lavender or lily of the valley. A favorite among pollinators, evening primrose blossoms produce a compound called linalool, a spicy, citrusy terpene (similar to bergamot) that draws in bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds whenever the blooms are open. However, evening primrose earned its common name because its fragrant flowers open at dusk and typically remain open only until the sun returns the next morning. This habit allows nighttime pollinators like sphinx moths, hawk moths, and bats to play a major role in pollination and plant production. Genus Name Oenothera Common Name Evening Primrose Plant Type Annual, Perennial Light Sun Height 6 to 12 inches Width 8 to 24 inches Flower Color Pink, White, Yellow Foliage Color Blue/Green, Purple/Burgundy Season Features Fall Bloom, Spring Bloom, Summer Bloom Special Features Attracts Birds, Fragrance, Good for Containers, Low Maintenance Zones 10, 11, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 Propagation Division, Seed Problem Solvers Deer Resistant, Drought Tolerant, Groundcover, Slope/Erosion Control Evening primroses are part of the Oenothera genus, a classification of herbaceous flowering plants that contains approximately 145 species of plants native to the Americas and 80 plants native specifically to North America. Placement requirements vary among the varieties, but most evening primroses prefer full sun and soil with excellent drainage. Evening primroses bloom happily in prairie and wildflower gardens and can be used to add color along wild pathways and roadsides. They can even grow in rocky, barren soil where other plants would perish. Evening primroses make an excellent addition to moon gardens (where they can bloom alongside other night bloomers like four o'clocks, angel's trumpets, and moonflowers), but use caution when planting them in fertile soil as they can get weedy. While evening primrose is not banned in any U.S. state, it is considered weedy and aggressive in many areas. Some varieties, like Mexican evening primrose or showy evening primrose, can self-seed and spread aggressively—especially in fertile, hospitable environments. If not properly managed, these plants can escape their initial planting and displace other plants or overtake a garden bed. Despite its weediness in some regions, you can buy young evening primrose plants and seeds at garden centers and nurseries nationwide. Young evening primrose plants can be put in the ground as soon as they arrive in nurseries, but they may not flower for an entire year after being planted. Start planting evening primrose from seed in the spring about 8 to 10 weeks before the last frost. Before you plant the seeds, place them in a plastic bag filled with moist sand and cold-stratify them for at least 60 days in the refrigerator. When the time arrives, sow the seeds by placing them about 4 to 6 inches below the soil line in groups of three or four and water them thoroughly. The spacing requirements differ by variety but should be based on the mature width of the plant. If you don't know the eventual width of your variety, place the plantings about 12 inches apart. You can direct-sow fresh seeds in the ground in the fall. After planting, keep the soil consistently moist but not wet until freezing temperatures arrive. Evening primroses can also be grown in containers, but not all varieties are suited for it—especially those with exceptionally long root systems. Be sure to choose a very deep pot at least 2 inches wider than the root system. With brilliant (often fragrant) yellow, pink, or white goblet-shape blooms, evening primroses are so easy to grow you'll find them thriving uncared for along roadsides. Despite their nighttime blooming habits, evening primrose plants do best when planted in full sun and receive at least six hours of exposure daily. Some varieties tolerate dappled sunlight and partial shade (especially in areas with very hot summers), but all are likely to develop rot or die if planted in full shade. Evening primroses prefer loamy, sandy soil with a neutral to slightly acidic pH (5.5 to 7.0). They are highly drought-tolerant and happiest in open, sunny meadows or when grown in rocky soil with only a little moisture. Unless your region suffers from significant dry spells, your evening primrose plants should require little (if any) supplemental water. If you are watering yours, watch for browning and discoloration of the leaves, as this may be a sign of overwatering. Evening primrose is a sun-loving plant that prefers temperatures between 64°F and 72°F. It suffers frost damage in temperatures below 15°F, but that damage is unlikely to deter the plant from returning in the spring. If you experience prolonged temperatures above 80°F and don't have trees or structures to protect the evening primrose plants from the harshest afternoon sun, they may suffer damage. Evening primroses prefer a dry to only moderately humid environment. Prolonged high humidity may cause your plants to develop fungal infections, such as leaf rot or botrytis blight. Evening primrose can grow even in poor, rocky soil, so most varieties require no fertilization—especially in their native climates. If you want to encourage prolific flowering, apply a liquid fertilizer high in phosphorus following product label instructions, or amend the soil with organic material before planting. Pruning your evening primroses is not necessary to maintain basic plant health, but you can cut them back after blooming to prevent self-seeding. Just pinch or snip off the fading flowers before they go to seed, and discard the blooms in a trash bag. Don't toss them on the ground or in a compost bin, where the seeds could unintentionally spread and grow. Aphids, leafhoppers, and spider mites are common pests for evening primrose plants. If you spot them, spray them off with soapy water. Slugs and snails are common visitors to evening primrose plants, but they can be deterred with traps, bait, or abrasives like eggshells, dry ash, or diatomaceous earth. You may occasionally spot beetles dining on the leaves of your evening primrose plant, but they are unlikely to cause significant damage. If your evening primrose plants are placed in an area with poor drainage, they may be susceptible to root rot, crown rot, and fungal infections. If any of these develop, your plants might still be salvageable. Before tossing them, amend the soil with compost or relocate the plants to an area with better drainage. To determine if the soil has good drainage, dig a hole about 12-18 inches wide and 12-18 inches deep (it doesn't have to be exact). Next, fill the hole with water. When it drains, refill it with water and wait for it to drain again. In soil with good drainage, the level should drop about an inch per hour. The easiest way to propagate evening primrose is via seed. If you already have plants, you don't need to buy seeds. You can harvest them straight from your existing plants when the seed pods turn brown and papery. Just capture them before the seed pods open and spill the seeds to the ground. Freshly harvested seeds can be planted immediately in the fall, or you can save them until spring and cold-stratify them before sowing them in the ground. Some evening primrose plants can also be divided. Oenothera macrocarpa (big fruit evening primrose) doesn't take well to it, but others may benefit from an occasional division. Carefully dig up a root system and slice the roots into equal sections with a sharp, sterile blade. Plant each new section at least 6 to 12 inches apart. Oenothera macrocarpa 'Greencourt Lemon' has pale greenish-yellow goblet flowers on red stems. Each flower may reach 5 inches across, and the plants grow 6 inches tall. Native to the southern and central parts of the United States, it grows in dry forest clearings, along roadsides, and on well-draining rocky bluffs. Zones 3-7 Oenothera 'Lemon Drop' is an ultra-tough selection that holds up very well to heat and drought. Unlike other evening primroses, Lemon drop flowers stay open during the day. This variety blooms in spring and summer and grows 12 inches tall and 24 inches wide. Zones 5-11 Showy evening primrose (also known as pink ladies, Mexican evening primrose, or Oenothera speciosa) is native to the southwestern parts of the United States and Mexico. It makes an excellent heat-, drought- and humidity-tolerant groundcover that rewards you in midsummer with cupped pink flowers that open in the evening or on cloudy days. It's pretty and easy to grow, but showy evening primrose is a bit of a garden bed bully. It spreads aggressively in ideal conditions, so make sure it has room to ramble or be ready to tackle lots of volunteer plants. You can also plant it in rocky, infertile soil to slow its growth. Zones 5-8 Oenothera speciosa var. childsii is less aggressive than standard showy evening primrose and bears delicate 1-inch pink flowers veined in deeper pink. The 12-inch-tall plants bear softly hairy lance-shaped leaves on slender stems. Zones 5-8 Credit: Gerry Whitmont / Getty Images Pink evening primrose (Oenothera rosea) is native to northern Mexico and Texas. It features masses of fragrant, saucer-shaped blooms that typically measure 2 inches across and have bright yellow centers. Flowers appear from late spring to midsummer and are followed by seed capsules easily captured by the wind. It can be aggressive if it is not managed or contained. Zones 4-9 Credit: CC BY-2.0/Flickr/Harry Rose Beach evening primrose (Oenothera drummondii), as the name implies, is typically found on sandy beaches. It features sunny yellow petals, sometimes tipped in pale yellow or white. It has a creeping, shrubby growth habit. Beach evening primrose is native to northern Mexico and the southeastern United States, so it grows best in temperate, Mediterranean-like climates, deserts, and subtropical regions. It is hardy as a perennial in Zones 8-11 but can be grown as an annual in Zones 3-8. Loosestrife (Lysimachia spp.) is a vigorous grower and beautiful addition to almost any garden. They vary from tall, stately plants suitable for borders to others that can be planted as creeping groundcovers. The blooms vary too—from tight spikes of 1/2 inch to 1-inch cups carried alone or in whorls. Humus-rich, moisture-retentive soil is recommended (although some varieties enjoy wet soil and ample water). Several sorts may become aggressive and need to be corralled. Zones 4-9 Part of a big group of native plants in the daisy family, helenium offers cheery yellow, orange, or red blooms at the end of the season. Despite its common name sneezeweed, it won't aggravate your allergies. It is so named because the flowers were made into snuff and used to induce sneezing to clear congestion. Zones 3-8 Daylilies are so easy to grow you'll often find them thriving in ditches and fields. These rogue flowers are likely escapees from gardens, but they look so delicate with their glorious trumpet-shaped blooms—some fragrant—in tropical colors. There are some 50,000 named hybrid cultivars with a range of bloom sizes (the minis are very popular), as well as different forms and plant heights. Although each bloom lasts only a day, superior cultivars carry numerous buds on each scape, so bloom time is long, especially if you deadhead daily. The strappy foliage of daylilies may be evergreen or deciduous. Zones 3-10 Credit: Illustration by Mavis Augustine Torke Break up the monotony of a boring stretch of landscape with a garden plan that is as stunning from the back as it is from the front and side. This low-maintenance space is anchored by an ornamental plum tree and features a collection of perennials (like bellflowers and golden columbine) and flowering groundcovers (like barrenwort) to add seasonal splashes of color. You can add even more color with a series of optional spring bulbs like daffodils and tulips. Frequently Asked Questions Despite their common name, evening primrose is not a close cousin to true primroses (Primula). Evening primroses are part of the Oenothera genus, a collection of flowering herbaceous plants mostly native to North America. Primula primroses are early-blooming perennials that come in a rainbow of colors and are hardy in Zones 2-8. Most primroses feature clusters of dainty blossoms held at the end of long stalks. Evening primroses' life span depends on the variety and climate, but most are biennials that live approximately two years. However, once planted, they are self-seeding and continue to grow year after year in the same spot (and often beyond). Yes, the roots, leaves, flowers, and seeds are edible. They're often eaten as salads or as a cooked vegetable. Just be careful no pesticides have been used on the evening primrose that you plan to eat. Whether it's the blooms of an evening primrose, a pizza delivery place with extended hours, or a 24/7 gas station during a well-hydrated road trip, anything that's "open late" can be an absolute blessing. We link to vendors to help you find relevant products. If you buy from one of our links, we may earn a commission. In the case of Oenothera, it definitely is. With stunning flowers that open up later in the day than most other blooms, evening primroses certainly live up to their name. Add a variety of beautiful forms and a robust toughness to the mix, and Oenothera species absolutely warrant being added to your garden. "But how do I propagate these plants?" "How should I care for them afterwards?" "And how do evening primroses fit into humanity's body of knowledge on evolutionary biology?" You're probably brimming with questions, so we've whipped up a growing guide just for you. You'll have your answers, dear reader… and more. Let's get it started. Here's everything we'll cover, up ahead: Evening primroses are about 145 species of herbaceous flowers from the Oenothera genus, which belongs to the Onagraceae, or the evening primrose family. Depending on the variety, evening primroses – also known as coffee plants, golden candlesticks, and a host of other nicknames, depending on the species – can be annuals, biennials, or perennials. Suitable growing regions range across USDA Zones 3 to 11. Oenothera species are native to North and South America, although they've naturalized in Europe and many other parts of the world. With a wide range of habitats and climates that they call home, evening primroses are pretty tough flowers, with built-in durability against many environmental stressors that would make short work of weaker plants. Oenothera plants display large, goblet-like flowers in white, yellow, red, pink, or purple hues, each with four petals. Some species flaunt fragrant blooms, while others are pretty much scentless. Depending on the variety, they may bloom from spring to fall. Evening primrose is so named for its habit of only showing its attractive blooms late in the day in a manner similar to four o'clock flowers, leaving them open until around mid-morning the following day, at which point the flowers expire. But while each individual bloom doesn't last for very long, new flowers will take the place of old ones throughout the blooming period. Since the flowers are open during the later hours, they're often visited by pollinators of the night, including various types of moths and vespertine bees. After pollination, the blooms eventually give way to four-capsuled, seed-bearing fruits. Some varieties have an upright growth habit, reaching a height of six feet with a spread of two feet, whereas others are used as ground cover or in container plantings, growing no higher than six inches. Across the majority of the genus, the green leaves are elliptical to lance-shaped. Certain varieties have the tendency to grow rather aggressively, and particular locales may list those types as invasive. Always check your area's rules and regulations prior to selecting a species or cultivar and planting location! Cultivation and History Evening primroses aren't just pretty, they can also be useful. Native Americans used the whole of O. biennis for food and treating bruises, and also used its roots specifically for treating hemorrhoids. The leaves were traditionally used for tending to minor wounds, gastrointestinal issues, and sore throats. In the 1600s, Oenothera plants were exported to Europe, where they have since naturalized. There, O. biennis found many different medicinal applications, earning nicknames such as "king's cure-all" and "fever-plant." Today, oil pressed from the seeds of O. biennis is marketed in capsule form to help a number of conditions including eczema, rheumatoid arthritis, premenstrual syndrome, and osteoporosis. The gamma linolenic acid — aka GLA, a type of omega-6 fatty acid — contained within the oil is used by the body to regulate blood pressure and to keep the immune system functioning well. The roots, which are said to have a light peppery taste similar to salsify, can be eaten raw or prepared as you would any root vegetable. Birds, perhaps seeking a little omega-6 of their own, enjoy eating the plant's seeds, as do some humans who use them as one might use poppy seeds. Here's a question for you, though: what do evening primrose flowers and the X-Men have in common? Answer: an association with mutation. Let's back up a bit. In the late 1800s, Dutch botanist and geneticist Hugo de Vries noticed significant differences between wild and cultivated varieties of O. lamarckiana. At the time, he thought these differences were due to mutations that rapidly and observably changed traits between generations. Nowadays, we know that Oenothera plants don't always follow the typical rules of gene inheritance, and that they're also easily prone to hybridization with other species. Meaning, Oenothera offspring can look significantly different from their parents, and this has less to do with mutations and more to do with cross-breeding, and the unusual way that these plants can pass down genes. But de Vries didn't know what we now know about Oenothera genetics. Observing spontaneous new forms and varieties while cultivating evening primroses, he used these flowers and his observations to form his mutation theory, which proposed that new species are rapidly formed from sudden and unexpected mutations. This theory clashed with Darwinian ideas about evolution, which argued that a gradual process of natural selection is what drives evolution. But de Vries' efforts weren't for nothing, far from it. As the father of mutation theory, his work introduced the idea of mutations to evolutionary science, paving the way for future scientists to discover that mutations didn't drive evolution, but rather, provided more genetic variation for the natural selection process to work with. So, in a roundabout way, we partially owe our knowledge of mutations – and evolution as a whole – to the humble evening primrose. How cool is that? Want some Oenothera of your own? I thought you might. Evening primroses are best propagated from seed, from divisions, or via transplanting. As you can imagine, sowing seeds requires seeds, which can be harvested, purchased, and/or acquired from a friend. To harvest some seeds for sowing, you should remove the fruits once they develop a brown, papery look. But make sure to pluck them before the fruit tips open, lest the seed spill on the ground. The fruits will require frequent check-ups so you can pluck them at the right time. When it's time, puncture the tip with a sharp and sterile blade, open up the fruit, and gently shake out the seeds. As a workaround to regular monitoring, you could cover the fruits with gauzy organza bags, which will catch the seeds whenever they drop on their own. The material is densely-meshed enough for catching seeds, yet open enough to allow for light exposure and airflow. Have your seeds? You can either sow them outdoors in the fall, or cold-stratify them indoors before outdoor sowing the following spring. For sowing seeds in autumn, do so just below the soil line in well-draining, moderately fertile garden soil with a pH of 6.0 to 7.0. If you want to be on the safe side, sow the seeds in groups of four. Space the groups of seeds as far apart as your chosen variety's typical width. Keep the soil around the seeds moist until freezing temperatures set in. At this point, your work is done until after the final frost date in spring. Before you sow seeds outdoors in spring, you'll have to cold-stratify them. Two months or so prior to the planned planting date in post-frost spring, put the seeds in a plastic bag of moist sand. Keep the bag in the fridge for 60 days – making sure to keep the sand moist all the while, then sow them outdoors using the above planting protocol. Alternatively, you can also sow seeds directly into outdoor containers rather than the ground. If you go the container route, plant your four-seed groups into their own three- to four-inch containers, each filled with a 50:50 mix of peat moss and perlite. Care for them like you would in-ground seeds, and be sure to repot them as needed to keep the plants an inch or two away from the container's sides. Not every species is ideal for container growing, especially the ones with long taproots. For any species you consider, make sure you have an idea of what the mature root system will look like! Not every Oenothera species likes being divided, O. macrocarpa being one of them. But if your chosen perennial species can handle it, division is a quick and efficient way to acquire more evening primroses. Timing this depends on when your chosen species blooms. Early bloomers should be divided promptly after they finish blooming, while later bloomers should be divided in early spring. This ensures that a plant's strength isn't sapped right before it flowers. Once it's division time, dig a circle around and gently lift out your chosen specimen, making sure to handle the root system with tender, loving care. Lay out the specimen over a tarp, and turn that TLC into tough love by slicing the plant apart into equally-sized sections with a sharp, sterile blade. At this point, each division is ready for transplanting! Prior to transplanting, prepare a planting site or adequately-sized and well-draining container for each transplant. Dig holes deep enough for their root systems and wide enough to give yourself some elbow room in which to work and the roots to spread. Then, carefully lower each transplant into its planting site. If you want your transplants to start off with a bit of added fertility, feel free to mix some organic material in with the dug-out soil. Backfill the holes and water the transplants in. The soil will need to be kept moist until the transplants establish themselves in a year or two. Moist, not saturated – you don't want to have a case of root rot on your hands! Obviously, these recommendations are intentionally kept general since we're covering a whole genus of plants. I'd definitely recommend double-checking the particular requirements of your chosen species! The aforementioned hardiness within USDA Zones 3 to 11 spans the entire genus – for each of those zones, there's at least one type of Oenothera that can work. Evening primrose flowers will do well in full sun to partial shade, depending on the variety. Oenothera plants prefer well-draining soils within a standard pH range of 6.0 to 7.0, but they'll tolerate higher pH levels. They do fairly well in poor soils, but they really thrive in soils that have been amended with some organic matter. Keep fertility up by working an inch or two of organic matter into the root zone of your plantings each spring. Most varieties of Oenothera are quite drought tolerant, requiring little supplemental watering. You could honestly let the rain do all the watering for you, and your evening primroses should do just fine. But there's a significant difference between "fine" and fine, if you catch my meaning… and optimal irrigation entails watering whenever the soil completely dries out. Provide full sun to partial shade, depending on the species. Well-draining soil is essential. Ideally, water whenever the soil is totally dry. Pruning and Maintenance As these plants are primarily known for their flowers, you'll get a lot more out of their blooming period if you deadhead the blooms as soon as they're spent. Depending on the variety, a bit of mulch could be helpful for maintaining moisture and preventing weeds, adding to the aesthetics of your garden as well. If your specimens are spreading and growing more aggressively than you'd like, feel free to pull any undesired ones that happen to pop up. To reduce the plant's growth rate and make things a bit easier for yourself, you can actually cut back on irrigation and let the rainfall do most, if not all, of the watering. Containerized evening primroses should be repotted as needed to prevent root bindage – a pot that's about two inches wider than the root system is the standard to shoot for. There are many species of Oenothera out there… but which to choose? "Best" is subjective, of course, but I'm confident in recommending these bad boys: Common evening primrose, or O. biennis, can grow as tall as six feet with a spread of about two to three feet. Hardy in USDA Zones 4 to 9, this biennial solely produces leafy stalks in the first year. The second year's stalks, though, are adorned by large, lemon-yellow flowers before giving way to fruit capsules. Blooming from summer to fall, O. biennis is native throughout the United States and Canada, and is often found growing in prairies, thickets, and glades, and along roadsides. And although it may be common, it's certainly far from boring. O. berlandieri, or Mexican evening primrose, is a spreading perennial that only grows to a height of about 18 inches. Photo via Alamy. Native to Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and Mexico, this plant will grow in full sun while tolerating infertile soils and minimal water, even more so than many other evening primroses. Hardy in USDA Zones 5 to 8 and with pink to white flowers that bloom throughout spring and summer, the Mexican evening primrose is among the toughest of the tough. As a native Missourian, I'm a bit biased towards this one. A native of the southern and central United States and hardy within USDA Zones 3 to 7, O. macrocarpa is a sprawling perennial that reaches heights of nine to 12 inches and spreads 12 to 18 inches. With beautiful yellow blooms that emerge in spring and summer, the Missouri evening primrose is low in profile, yet high in beauty. Especially when you consider its fruits, which are especially large for an Oenothera and perfect for use in dried floral arrangements. You can learn more about Missouri evening primrose in our guide. Hardy in USDA Zones 4 to 9, the showy evening primrose certainly brings the goods, aesthetics-wise. Aka O. speciosa, it grows one to two feet tall, spreading one to one and a half feet wide, and flaunts beautiful blooms from late spring to summer. The flowers are white at first, but adopt a rosy pink hue over time as the plant matures. Showy Native to Mexico and the southwestern United States, the showy evening primrose is truly a flashy beauty, with evolving color that simply can't be ignored. For a packet of O. speciosa seeds, visit True Leaf Market. For the most part, evening primroses aren't prone to many diseases or pests. But there are some potential problems that you should be aware of. As insects move from plant to plant, they can vector a plethora of harmful diseases. So by managing pests, you'll also be managing disease to a degree. Leafhoppers are quarter-inch-long insects from the Cicadellidae family, and they usually congregate on stems and leaf undersides. The most common symptom of their presence is leaf stippling, i.e. small, pale, and discolored feeding spots. If severe, this feeding damage can cause leaves to turn yellow, brown, and die. Leafhoppers also excrete honeydew, which can attract ants and lead to black sooty mold formation. Natural enemies such as assassin bugs, lacewings, and ladybugs can make short work of these pests, along with sprays of horticultural oil or insecticidal soaps during the growing season. Bonide Insecticidal Soap Find 32 ounces of ready-to-spray insecticidal soap from Bonide, now on Amazon. Adult Lygus species are about a quarter-inch in length, with oval-shaped bodies and a triangular lobe above the wings. The nymphs are smaller, with a more rounded form and lighter-colored bodies. The colors vary between species, ranging from brown or black to yellow, red, or green. After overwintering in plant debris, adults emerge in early spring to feed on buds and shoots, mate, and lay eggs in the tissues of host plants. Come summer, nymphs hatch from the eggs, who feed from plants as they grow and mature. In a growing season, two to four generations may be born, the last of which overwinter during the dormant season to start the cycle anew the following year. With piercing-sucking mouthparts, lygus bugs extract vital fluids from plant cells. This hinders seed set and plant maturation, along with causing bud drop or flower abortion, which can be a real problem for blooms as beautiful as an evening primrose's. Regularly sweep your plants for these pests and signs of their presence. Remove nearby weeds and plant detritus, and use insecticidal soap as needed to smother these pests. Many beneficial insects such as minute pirate bugs, ladybugs, lacewings, and assassin bugs are known to consume lygus bugs. Many of these bugs are available for purchase at Arbico Organics. Interestingly, some gardeners plant Oenothera as a trap plant to attract Japanese beetles away from other, "more desirable" plants such as roses. But when beautiful evening primroses are the goal, the penchant of these pests can be quite annoying. As an adult, Popillia japonica is about a third of an inch to a half-inch long, with bronze wing covers alongside a metallic green head and thorax. The C-shaped grubs are cream-colored, with tan heads and easily visible legs. These invasive pests overwinter as grubs in the soil prior to pupating into adults in spring. Emerging from the ground fully grown in summer, Japanese beetles feed on plant foliage, flowers, and fruits, and they are capable of flying for miles to do so. They also mate and lay eggs in the soil, which continues the life cycle. As you can imagine, feeding holes left in leaves and flower petals don't look all that great, and they hinder plant health to boot. The grubs can also chew on roots, leading to tissue death above the soil line. An effective method of physical control, "soapy death" entails picking or flicking the bugs into a bucket of soapy water, which drowns them. If you catch a pair of bugs mating, don't be shy about going for double points – I imagine there are worse ways to go. Make sure to use soapy death in the morning or evening, when the bugs aren't as spry. Alternatively, you could use neem oil as a deterrent, but it does require repeat applications every few days or so. Learn more about how to manage Japanese beetles in our guide. To keep disease risk down to an absolute minimum, make sure to use sterilized gardening tools and disease-free soils. Caused by various types of fungi and bacteria, leaf spot results in the formation of brown and black spots on foliage, which can hinder photosynthesis and reduce plant aesthetics. Prune away and dispose of leaves if the majority of their surfaces are afflicted. In the case of fungal leaf spot, copper fungicides can work as a preventative measure if this issue has been a known problem in your garden in the past. A fungal disease of many different plants, powdery mildew leads to the formation of a downy white powder on plant surfaces, which is primarily a cosmetic concern. But depending on the severity, additional symptoms include necrotic lesions, stunted growth, leaf rolling, and even death in extreme cases. As high ambient humidity promotes disease development, it's important to properly space plants and avoid overhead irrigation. Rake up nearby plant detritus to interfere with fungal life cycles, and cut away any severely afflicted tissues for disposal. With drought tolerance often comes an inability to handle excess soil moisture, and Oenothera is no exception. Whether it's caused by too much watering, poor drainage, or a combination of both, oversaturated soils don't allow the roots to take up as much oxygen. This suffocation tends to leave the roots necrotic and mushy, followed by nasty aboveground symptoms in the shoots such as chlorosis, wilting, and even death. Preventing root rot requires reducing excess water, whether by limiting irrigation, improving soil drainage, or both. If your plants are already afflicted, dig up and remove the rotted roots. If the majority of the root system is rotted, then the plant should probably be pitched. With an assortment of species to choose from, there's an evening primrose for almost every garden. Along walkways and borders, in a raised bed or container, and as a ground cover or a grouping of specimens, species of Oenothera offer a ton of planting options. Regardless of the species, the late-day appearance of the flowers is a sight to behold. You could try your hand at using these plants for medicinal or culinary purposes, if you so desire. But it definitely pays to be cautious and do the necessary research before putting any part of a plant from the garden in or on your body. Plant Type:Herbaceous flowering annual, biennial, or perennialFlower/Foliage Color:Pink, purple, red, white, yellow/green Native to:North and South AmericaMaintenance:Low Hardiness (USDA Zones):3-11Tolerance:Alkaline soils, drought, heat, infertile soils, partial shade, rocky soils Bloom Time:Spring-fallSoil Type:Average to lean Exposure:Full sun, partial shadeSoil pH:6.0-7.0 Time to Maturity:4-6 monthsSoil Drainage:Well-draining Spacing:Depends on speciesAttracts:Birds, butterflies, moths, specialized bees Planting Depth:Slightly below soil surface (seeds), depth of root system (transplants)Uses:Borders, containers, cut flowers, ground covers, groupings, raised beds, rock gardens Height:6-72 inchesOrder:Myrtales Spread:12-36 inchesFamily:Onagraceae Water Needs:LowGenus:Oenothera Common Pests and Disease:Leafhoppers, lygus bugs, Japanese beetles; leaf spot, powdery mildew, root rotSpecies:Biennis, berlandieri, macrocarpa, pallida, speciosa If you're like me, then you've probably used a pros and cons list to make decisions. If you're considering a species of Oenothera for your garden, here's a spoiler warning: that list is gonna be quite imbalanced towards the "pros" side. Evening primroses are stunning, tough, and versatile plantings for your landscape – that's a claim I'll swear by. But the only way you'll know for sure is if you grow them for yourself. So what are you waiting for? Do you have anecdotes, questions, or experiences of your own to share? The comments section awaits. Looking for other drought-tolerant flowers to add to the garden? Lo and behold: Facebook548 X Flipboard © Ask the Experts, LLC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. See our TOS for more details. Originally published by Gretchen Heber on February 21, 2019. Last updated June 8, 2023. Product photos via Arbico Organics, Bonide, True Leaf Market. Uncredited photos: Shutterstock. 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Search over 300,000 plantsStemFlowerFoliageFruitSpring Green Summer Yellow Green Autumn Gold Yellow Green WinterSouth–facing or West–facingFamilyOnagraceaeNative to GB / IrelandNoFoliageDeciduousHabitColumnar uprightGenusOenothera can be annuals, biennials or perennials, upright or spreading in habit, with simple or lobed leaves and bowl-shaped, white, yellow or pink flowers over a long period in summerGrow in poor to moderately fertile, well-drained soil in full sunPropagate by seed sown in early summerCottage and informal gardenWildflower meadowWildlife gardensFlower borders and bedsMay be susceptible to powdery mildews and a leaf spotThe Royal Horticultural Society is the UK's leading gardening charity. We aim to enrich everyone's life through plants, and make the UK a greener and more beautiful place.