

4

Petunia



*Debmala Mukherjee and
Subhrajyoti Chatterjee*

1.0 Introduction

Petunias are one of the best summer flowering annuals for mass display. *Petunia* is genus of 30 species of flowering plants of South American origin. The popular flower of the same name derived its epithet from the French, which took the word 'petun', meaning 'tobacco', from a Tupi- Guarani language. An annual, most of the varieties seen in gardens are hybrids (*Petunia* × *atkinsiana*, also known as *Petunia* × *hybrida*). *Petunia* is a genus in the family Solanaceae, subfamily Petunioideae. Most petunias are diploid with 14 chromosomes and are interfertile with other petunia species. The basic petunia flower is funnel shape, but hybridizers have created many variations including singles and doubles with petals that have wavy or fringed margins. Many patterns are available in stripes, speckles and borders in an extensive colour palette that includes purple, mauve, lavender, pink, red, white and yellow.

2.0 Importance and Uses

2.1 Aesthetic Uses

Petunias are versatile annuals. They can be used for colour masses, borders, containers, hanging baskets or as a seasonal groundcover and also used in private garden, and building decoration. Some petunias are more suited to container growing, while others are better for massing in the garden. Petunias are a representative bedding plant known for their tolerance for hot and dry climates (Hoang and Kim, 2018) also. The showy trumpet-shaped flower of *Petunia* × *atkinsiana* is an excellent choice for summer flower beds and window boxes.

2.2 Therapeutic and other Uses

A mild flavour, they can be eaten raw in salads or be used as a garnish on other foods. The Maya and Inca believed that the scent of petunias had the power to ward off underworld monsters and spirits. Their flower-buds were bunched together for magical drinks. According to New Age folklore, Petunias will only thrive where there is 'positive energy' and will not grow in places where there is 'negativity'. When given as a gift, petunias have (in the language of flowers) two mutually exclusive meanings, symbolising on the one hand being comfortable with someone, and on the other anger and resentment.

3.0 Origin and History

The petunia, carries a close relation to tobacco, tomato, and the deadly nightshade. Spanish explorers in the 16th century discovered a low growing, white-flowered form the Tupi-Guarani Indians called 'Petun', which in their language translated to the 'worthless tobacco plant'. Considered 'ugly' the Spanish explorers did not send samples of the 'petun' back to Spain. The Mayan and Incas believed that the fragrance of the petunia could chase away the underworld monsters and spirits.

In 1823, King George III sent Joseph Bonaparte, (Napoleon's Brother) back to explore Argentina. During his journey, samples were collected and sent back to Spain where botanists confirmed the petunias relationship to tobacco. In 1831, a collector

Bhatia, R.

Division of Floriculture and Landscaping, ICAR-Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi 110012

Bhatia, S.

Division of Floriculture and Landscape Architecture, Dr. Y.S.P. University of Horticulture and Forestry, Nauni, Solan 173230, Himachal Pradesh

Biswas, B.

Department of Horticulture, Bidhan Chandra Krishi Vishwavidyalaya, Mohanpur 741252, West Bengal

Bose, T.K.

Department of Horticulture, Bidhan Chandra Krishi Vishwavidyalaya, Mohanpur 741252, West Bengal

Chatterjee, S.

Department of Horticulture, Centurion University of Technology and Management, Paralakhemundi 761211, Odisha

Chawla, S.L.

Navsari Agricultural University, Navsari 396450, Gujarat

Das, P.

Regional Plant Resource Centre, Bhubaneswar 751015, Odisha

Desai, B.B.

Department of Horticulture, Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth, Rahuri 413722, Maharashtra

Dhuna, R.S.

Bidhan Chandra Krishi Vishwavidyalaya, Mohanpur 741252, West Bengal

Dutta, K.

The Agri-Horticultural Society of India, 1 Alipore Road, Kolkata 700027, West Bengal

Ganga, M.

Department of Floriculture and Landscape Architecture, Horticultural College and Research Institute, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore 641003, Tamil Nadu

Gurung, A.

Division of Floriculture and Medicinal Crops, ICAR-Indian Institute of Horticultural Research, Bengaluru 560089, Karnataka