

Irresistible Monkeyflowers



Is there anyone who does not love monkeyflowers? Even the name is adorable. Given the variety of colors, their showiness, and their enthusiasm for going into bloom - with or without roots - they are irresistible.

Now for a wee bit of background before hitting you with colorful pictures – and yes, the term “garden porn” is accurate here. The genus *Mimulus*, formerly in the Figwort family (Scrophulariaceae), has been shown to be more closely related to the Lopseed family (Phrymaceae) and is now recognized as such. According to [Beardsley et al., 2004](#), there are approximately 120 species worldwide, and the Jepson Manual recognizes 67 different types of *Mimulus* in California. This is a large and confusing group of plants, with much disagreement among experts on taxonomy. (For those not up on the taxonomy debates, a quick and dirty explanation is: which plants are mostly closely related to which, and how closely related are they.)

We will limit the discussion here to shrubby monkeyflowers, including *Mimulus aurantiacus*, *M. puniceus*, *M. longiflorus*, *M. bifidus*, *M. flemingii*, and the resulting myriad of cultivars. Shrubby monkeyflowers have woody stems, and typically grow from two to three feet in height, and as wide or slightly wider. They do well in part-shade, especially in Southern California, blooming in mid to late spring. Most find them to be short-lived in the garden, usually three to five years. Some

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gardeners have a difficult time keeping them going for more than just one year. Since they root easily from cuttings, gardeners can ensure a continued supply by propagating from young, healthy plants. Each spring I take cuttings before the monkeyflowers go into bloom. I keep three to four cuttings in a decorative clay pot so that I can enjoy these flowering beauties while they bulk up for planting in the garden the following year. Monkeyflowers do well with winter or spring planting.

Cuttings put in pot with perlite/potting soil mix, and covered with plastic container to keep it from wilting



Containers with monkeyflower cuttings. Yellow flowering plant is *Mimulus* 'Sulfer Yellow' - and yes it is spelled with an 'f'. This is not a shrubby monkeyflower, but rather it is related to *Mimulus clevelandii*, I think.

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Southern monkeyflower from Southern California (*Mimulus aurantiacus*, or *M. longiflorus* to some – I told you there was a lot of debate!) is quite variable in flower color. It can be white, yellow, buff, orange or even pink. Back in 2008, a caller to the RSABG Garden Hotline alerted me to a white monkeyflower growing near Nix Nature Center in Orange County. I went to have a look and sure enough it was white, and right next to it was a lovely pink one. At Rancho the monkeyflowers in the North Garden come up every year in a dazzling variety of colors: deep red, orange with yellow margin, soft yellow and so on.

White monkeyflowers at [Nix Nature Center](#), Laguna Coast Wilderness Park

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multi-colored monkeyflowers at [Nix Nature Center](#), Laguna Coast Wilderness Park

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Plant breeders have had a field day with monkeyflowers. Cultivars have come from breeders including Richard Persoff, David Verity, Phil Van Soelen, and nurseries such as [Yerba Buena Nursery](#), [Tree of Life Nursery](#), [Theodore Payne Foundation](#), and [Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden](#), and others. Every year there seem to be more. ([Click on this link](#) for a list of 65 named cultivars.)

My favorite cultivars are Eleanor, Dos Equis, and Ruby Silver. Eleanor forms a dense shrub about three feet tall and wide. It maintains a fairly nice shape even when not in bloom. Its flowers are creamy yellow, getting lighter toward the throat and margins, with orange markings in the center. Dos Equis is much smaller but it blooms prolifically over a long period of time. Its flowers are rich orange, and reddish-orange on the outside of the bloom. Ruby Silver has a deep mauve color with a metallic hint. It has lasted many years in my garden, though it tends to be a bit rangy.

Mimulus 'Eleanor' bloomng in late April.

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Mimulus 'Dos Equis' blooming in late March. It has a long bloom period.

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Mimulus 'Ruby Silver'

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As for care, do not pamper and over water these plants. They will respond with excessive growth and will likely rot out quickly. In the valleys and inland areas plant in part shade. When the plants are young they grow very quickly. Pinch back to maintain a dense form. The stems you remove in early spring can be rooted for future use in the garden. After the bloom period is over, cut back the flowering stems. If you water in the summer, after cutting back the spent flowers, they will go into bloom again. This shortens the life of the plants, but can give you a very long bloom period. The plants can be pruned lightly again in fall or winter before they start actively growing.

Check out the [slide show on my blog](#) and on [flickr](#) for more pictures of these delightful flowers. (Please remember all images are copyrighted and may not be reproduced/used on another site without my approval. Thanks.)