

Nuggets of Knowledge®

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***Romneya coulteri* (matilija poppy/fried egg plant).** At Cornflower Farms in Elk Grove, California, we specialize in California native plants and the one I'm going to briefly talk about is *R. coulteri*, also called the matilija poppy or the fried egg plant, because of the huge white blossom with a yellow ball of stamens, resembling a fried egg. It's a very popular plant because of its showy flowers.

Romneya coulteri's native habitat is coastal southern California, around Ventura. It does best in very dry soil. It's been tricky to propagate in the nursery industry, but once established in an area it grows like wildfire. We've had some luck at Cornflower Farms growing it from seeds.

We have several mother plants growing on the nursery where we collect seed in the late summer/fall (August-September). Cleaning the seed is easy, crushing the seed pods and filtering out the chaff. We get lots of powder, but don't worry about that too much. Seed is stored at 38–42 °F until we sow it in March.

Sowing. We sow the seed in 17-inch × 17-inch seed flats. Our soil is a mixture of perlite and peat moss. After sowing the seeds we put a 4-inch layer of pine needles and then light them on fire. We use a barbecue lighter in case the fire goes out we can relight the leaves easily. We let the leaves burn down and cool. After all has cooled, we water the seed flats and put it on the seedling bench. We generally see fairly even germination after about 2–3 weeks.

Transplanting. We transplant sooner than later to minimize root disturbance. We've seen that the longer we wait for transplanting, the more we lose. The rose pots are pre-filled with potting soil, watered very well and then the seedlings are dibbled in. After a flat is planted, they are watered in very gently. After the initial watering, they are kept fairly dry. After getting over the transplant shock, they grow rapidly and are ready for transplanting into 1-gal containers. For transplanting into 1-gal containers, we water the flats very well and pre-fill the 1-gal containers. The seedlings are then loosened from the rose pots and planted by hand.

Problems. For the most part, there are no disease problems, but if a plant is transplanted too deeply, it takes just days to die. Also, we have to be very careful during the transplanting stages, not planting the tiny seedling too deep and making sure the seedling is not bent after watering in. In the liner stage, the tops break off very easily from the roots and won't grow back at that point.

Germination Chamber Notes

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As our seed-propagated perennial program continued to expand, it became apparent that we needed a better germination environment. A germination chamber with