



A Secrets of Virginia Gardening  
Presentation

18 February 2026

# Growing Ranunculus in Central Virginia

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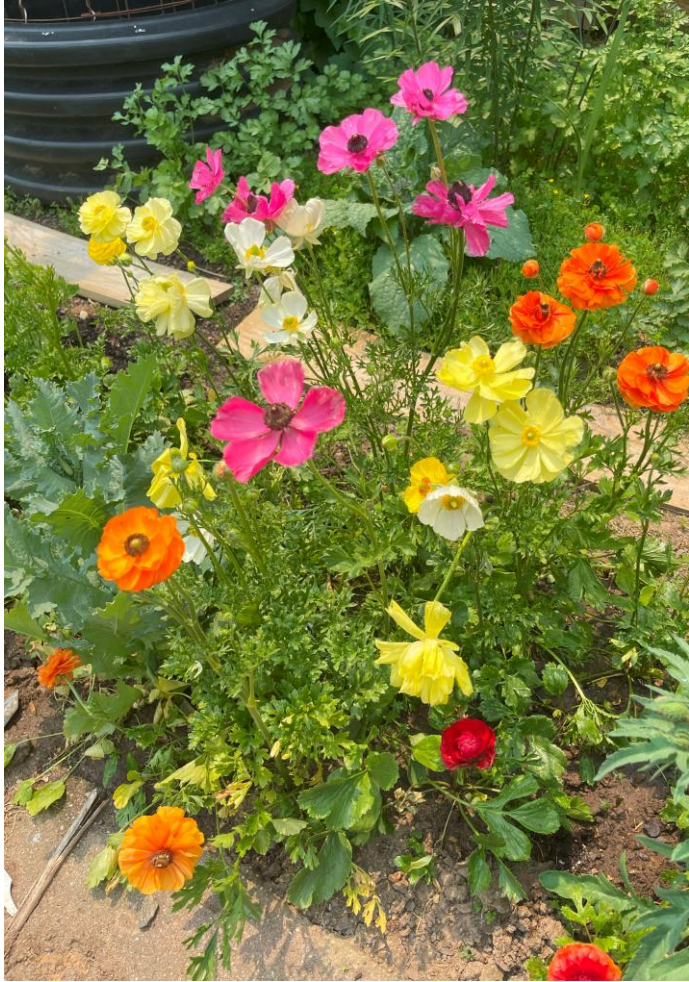
AJ Frank Muralidhar

# Introduction

Good afternoon - my name is AJ Frank Muralidhar. I'm an Associate member of MGACRA, which means I get to hang out with amazing Master Gardeners. I'm a Navy Engineer, work full time in Dahlgren VA. I took the time off to be with you here today, and I am grateful to you all for being here to support me. Thank you for the opportunity to be here to address the Master Gardener community.

I am an Experimental Gardener... all that means is that I push the gardening envelope, and I make more gardening mistakes than anyone else. Sometimes I even learn from them 😊. I've gardened in Virginia since 2009, before that in Pennsylvania, Illinois, California and India. I garden in Spotsylvania on a regular suburban lot - I grow Roses, Peonies and container Waterlilies. My favorite annuals are Giant Poppies, Nigella, Foxgloves, Canterbury Bells, Larkspurs, Cosmos, Dahlias from seed and Asian vegetables. My garden is open to visitors April through November – last Frost to first Frost.

Thank you to Master Gardener Manon Dixon for introducing me to volunteering opportunities at Chatham Manor, Porter Library Garden and State Fair volunteer opportunities. I hope to see you all again at the MGACRA Annual Symposium in April.



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Acknowledgements

Ranunculus or Persian Buttercups give their name to the great Ranunculaceae family - many members of this family are garden favorites - they include Buttercups, Anemones, Japanese Anemones, Hellebores, Nigella, Clematis, Columbines, Larkspurs etc. Poppies are close relatives too – Papaveraceae belong to the Order Ranunculales.

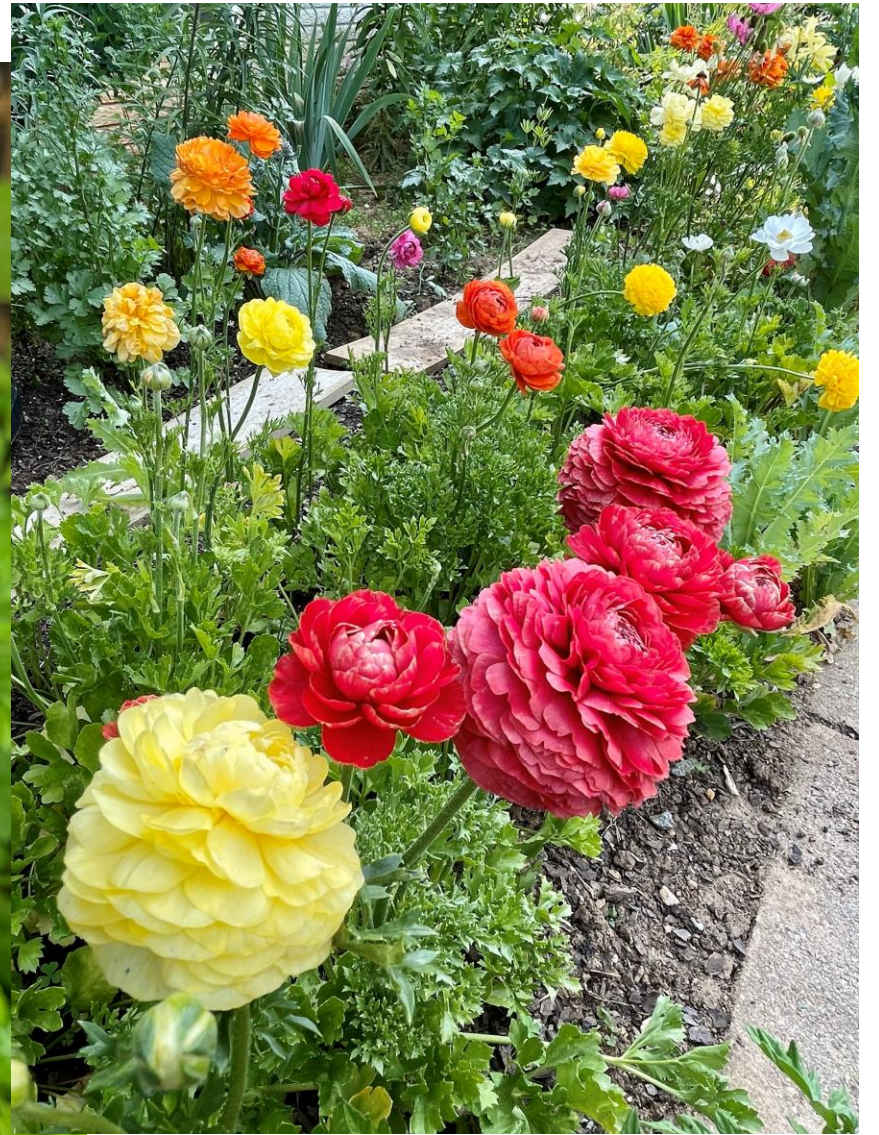


## Ranunculus in the Garden





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# Ranunculus Corms

- Ranunculus or Persian Buttercups give their name to the great Ranunculaceae family - this includes Buttercups, Anemones, Japanese Anemones, Hellebores, Nigella, Clematis, Columbines, Larkspurs etc. Poppies are close relatives too – Papaveraceae belong to the Order Ranunculales.
- Purchase the dry, dormant spider-like corms in Fall or early spring as soon as they become available. They look like tiny dahlia roots. Store in a cool dry place like an unheated garage until you're ready to plant. Do not refrigerate.
- Big Box and Online stores usually carry them in March when they get the rest of the Spring and Summer bulbs and roots. They store them in terrible conditions - warm temps, bright light, dry air, temperature fluctuations - all bad for bulbs, roots and corms.
- Inspect your corms carefully when you get them- they should be a nice tan color, and as big as a thumbnail at least.
- The spidery legs should be intact (they are very brittle when dry, and break easily -one or 2 legs missing per corm is ok, it's normal during shipping)'

# Bed Preparation

- Prepare the planting bed well at least one or two days ahead of planting, dig the planting bed to a depth of 4 inches, remove any roots, weeds and rocks.
- It's ok if the soil is still lumpy... it'll break down. 1 inch lumps are fine. Soil does not have to be fine tilth. Add some compost or bagged garden soil to amend if it's too clayey and forms big lumps.
- Sprinkle 1/3 to 1/2 cup 10-10-10 fertilizer every 10 square ft ( 5 ft x2 ft bed) or a 1 cup of Espoma GardenTone or PlantTone plant food and work it in well. Water it in, let it sit for a day or so.
- **IMPORTANT** - make sure your bed is prepared **BEFORE** you soak the spider like roots. See below for bed preparation.

# Corm Preparation

- Once bed is done and settled, THEN prepare to plant the dry spider like corms.
- If 2 or more roots are tangled together, DO NOT try to separate them when dry. They will be easier to separate after soaking. If they can't be separated without risking breaking the legs, don't worry, they will grow just fine.
- DO Hydrate the corms by soaking in cool tap water for 2 to 4 hours.
- Do NOT soak corms for too long- they'll start to rot.
- Do NOT let the swollen hydrated corms sit around for long; plant as soon as possible. If left outside without planting, they'll get moldy and slimy.



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Ranunculus are at once the most frustrating, most temperamental and most rewarding flower I have ever grown – some years, they do wonderfully, other times they bloom sparsely. Early warm weather in March-April does them in quickly. 2025 was a terrible year.



# Growing Ranunculus



# Planting Ranunculus

- Ranunculus are planted with the top of the corms at least 2 inches below soil level, 4 inches apart
- For North, North Central and Piedmont Virginia, plant corms in late February early March (I plant March 1-5 every year in my Spotsylvania garden).
- Ranunculus needs about 10-12 weeks of cold/cool weather after planting to grow well. For northern Virginia and Piedmont region this will happen March-May, so flowering can happen in June. For southwest and coastal Virginia, the cool growing period will be February-April
- For Richmond and further south and towards SW Virginia and SE Virginia, Fall planting works well – gardeners can plant from November to January. It's getting warm very early these past few years

# Planting Ranunculus - continued

- Corms need to be soaked for 2-4 hours to rehydrate them. See CORM PREPARATION for soaking.
- Soaking is not necessary if planted in Fall in the warmer areas of Virginia, especially if it's been raining.
- If it's dry, water the bed moderately a day in advance and plant. Plant with the top of the corm at least 2 inches below soil surface.
- Planting distance is 4-5 inches between each root - the plants will fill in the space. Ranunculus corms produce a mass of hairy roots from the corm that will make them 4 times larger about a month after planting.
- You can spread them out some more to 6 inches if you have room; air circulation is good for them; the leaves are very susceptible to powdery mildew after rain. (Good lesson learned for me)

# Note on Pre-sprouting

- You can also pre-sprout ranunculus before planting, to give them a head start before getting them into the ground.
- I've found that keeping them indoors at room temperature and moist conditions often causes fungal attacks and rots several corms.
- Many gardeners have good results with pre-sprouting if they are careful with air circulation around the moist corms. Don't be afraid to experiment with a few corms.
- Pre-sprouting is not necessary for southern and coastal Fall planting areas.
- I never pre-sprout, just leave the sprouting to Mother Nature... lazy gardener here 😊

# Container Ranunculus

- Ranunculus also does well as a potted plant, you often find ranunculus sold in broad shallow pots at Wegmans and other retailers. They are grown in greenhouses with good air circulation.
- Potted Ranunculus is highly susceptible to fuzzy white downy mildew and aphid attacks.
- Keep a close eye on the pots. Keep them outdoors where it's cool.
- Pull them up against a house wall to prevent freezing.
- Southern Virginia gardeners planting in Fall should be careful to prevent pots from freezing in December-February.
- Spring planting in pots is safer but take precautions against sudden late hard freezes. Pull pots up against a south or west facing window.

# Ranunculus Care

- Ranunculus needs excellent drainage.... No standing water! Don't let the soil get soggy and waterlogged.
- Waterlogged soil and cold nights are a recipe for disaster; let the top of the soil get slightly dry between watering.
- Keep an eye out for woolly aphids when the leaves are growing. They tend to get at the crown at soil level.
- Spray some Neem or favorite pesticide of your choice (I hate it, but Sevin dust works, but... the problem with white dust is that the woolly aphids will be perfectly camouflaged, and you can't spot them)

# Growth and Flowering

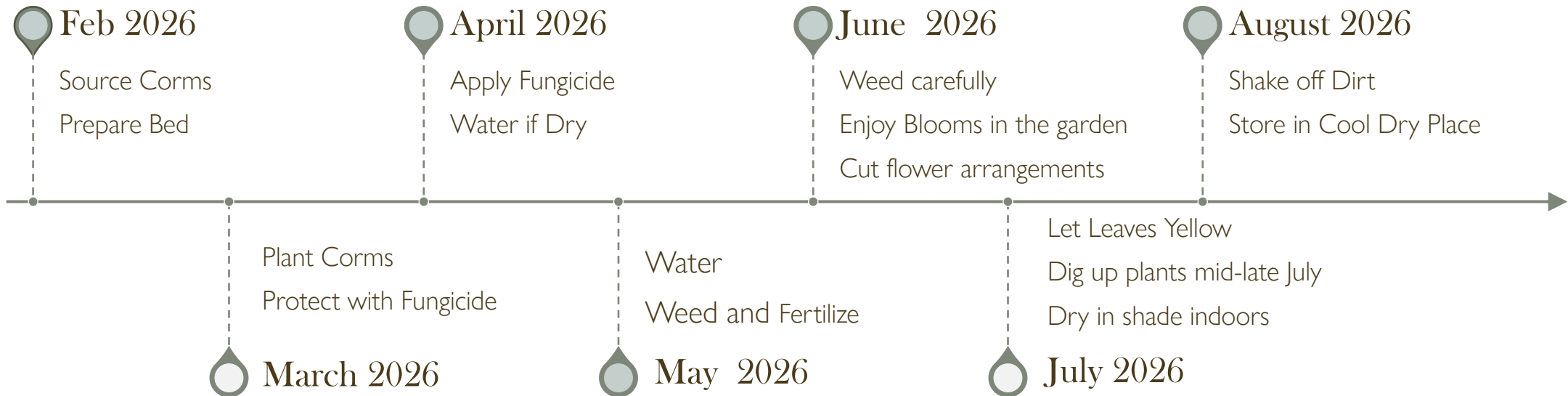
- Ranunculus needs about 10-12 weeks of cool growing weather from planting to bloom. Each corm will send up several flower stems. We tend to warm up suddenly in April, hitting 90 degrees F - not good for many Spring flowers.
- The first leaves will emerge within 2 weeks or so, they'll be tiny at first, and grow very slowly. Be patient. They'll take off in late May and start putting out more leaves; buds will form in early June and start opening ... and opening.
- Buds appear suddenly when 9-10 weeks of growth have passed. The leaves may still be 3-4 inches, but the bud stalks will shoot up.
- When they bloom, it seems like it takes 2-3 days for a ranunculus flower to open fully, but it gets more beautiful each day. It's well worth the wait.
- Flowering lasts for about 3 weeks, longer if it stays cool in May-June. Hot weather puts an end to blooming.

# After Flowering

- When they are done blooming, the leaves will turn yellow and die down as the corms become dormant in warm weather.
- When leaves yellow, dig up the corms, shake off as much dirt as possible. ( If you want the dirt off, wash quickly, do not let them soak) I generally just dig up the root mass, shake off as much dirt as possible and let them dry like that in a plastic planter pot with drain holes.
- The corms will have multiplied, each corm making a few large and smaller corms. They can be separated at any time, but it's best to wait until we are ready to plant them. They separate more easily when they're soaked. Dry corms are very brittle.
- The larger corms will bloom the following year; Smaller corms are also planted. An additional season of growth will make them large enough to bloom the following season.



# Ranunculus Timeline - North-Central VA





Questions?





# Acknowledgements

Thank you to my gardening friends from the local FB Garden Groups:  
Virginia Gardening, Gardening in the Fredericksburg Area, Stafford Area  
Gardeners, Supergardeners. Southern Exposure Seed Exchange Gardeners.  
They are my Family.

A shoutout to volunteers who keep Chatham Manor Historical Garden  
beautiful and of course, to all my Master Gardener friends who work  
tirelessly to make our communities green.





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# Support the World Central Kitchen!

A personal appeal – as the please keep the work of the World Central Kitchen in your hearts – this is the organization started by Chef Jose Andres to provide hot meals in Crisis stricken areas. Check them out at [www.wck.org](http://www.wck.org).

100% of the proceeds of sales of seeds, flowers, tools, books and prints through AJ Frank Gardening and Happy Seed Company go towards supporting WCK's mission as well as Community and School Gardens with seeds and tools.

Thank you.





Thank You!



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