FLOWERS · A GARDEN BED WITH MORNING SUN OR BRIGHT PARTIAL SHADE

Let's grow foxglove.

Digitalis purpurea

This plan is for **Digitalis purpurea**

Is this your plant? This three-plant bed is for common Digitalis purpurea. Young ordinary plants usually form leaves before flowering in year two. Named first-year selections and other Digitalis species can behave differently.

Tall flower bells for a little garden drama.

6 × 3 ft garden bed **3 nursery plants**

Before you start

Plant nursery starts in moderate spring weather; acclimate greenhouse plants first. Give afternoon shade in hot regions, and check local suitability before allowing seedlings to spread.

By jennyzhuang

Sources checked September 26, 2026 View sources

LIGHT

Sun or bright partial shade

Give afternoon shade in hotter regions.

WATER

Likes moist soil

Keep new root balls from drying out; avoid a soggy crown.

FEEDING

Compost, then check

No regular liquid feed in a reasonably fertile bed.

All parts are highly poisonous if swallowed. Choose a different flower if children or pets are likely to taste plants.

BEFORE YOU START

Your little kit.

- ✓ 3 Digitalis purpurea nursery plants
- ✓ A trowel, watering can, and compost if the soil is poor
- ✓ Optional stakes and soft ties for exposed flower spikes

THE SOIL

Moist, well-drained garden soil with organic matter. Improve poor soil with compost before planting.

Start with what's on this list. Add plant food only when the feeding section says it's needed.

YOUR SIMPLE GROWING PLAN

A garden bed. Here's the plan.

A garden bed with morning sun or bright partial shade. Start with **nursery plants**.

THE SPACE

6 × 3 ft garden bed

One row of 3 plants, 24 inches apart, centered across the bed. This roomy layout is for common Digitalis purpurea; check the nursery tag if a named selection grows wider.

HOW MANY

3 nursery plants

Buy 3 plants labeled Digitalis purpurea. Young ordinary biennial plants usually make leaves first; choose plants already in bud if you want flowers this season. Named first-year types are an exception.

THE SPACE

6 × 3 ft garden bed



In the ground

START WITH

3 nursery plants



Illustration · not to scale

6 × 3 ft garden bed · 3 nursery plants One row of 3 plants, 24 inches apart, centered across the bed. This roomy layout is for common Digitalis purpurea; check the nursery tag if a named selection grows wider. Buy 3 plants labeled Digitalis purpurea. Young ordinary biennial plants usually make leaves first; choose plants already in bud if you want flowers this season. Named first-year types are an exception. Original illustration; not to scale.

01

Mark three positions

In a 6 × 3 ft bed, mark positions 1, 3, and 5 ft along its length, centered across the width.

02

Plant at the existing soil level

Dig each hole about twice as wide as its root ball and no deeper. Loosen circling outer roots gently. Keep the top of the root ball level with the surrounding ground, then backfill with the excavated soil.

03

Water and leave breathing room

Soak the root zone. Keep mulch off the crowns and give the leaves room for air to move.

04

Let the flower spikes rise

A young leaf rosette may wait until its second year to flower. Support tall stems loosely where wind can bend them. When a spike has finished, cut the whole spent flower stem near its base to limit seed spread; leave the living basal leaves in place.

Other ways to start

Grow next year's plants from seed

For ordinary Digitalis purpurea, sow indoors in late spring for a later garden display. A small starter batch is 2 tiny seeds in each of 6 cells of moist seed-starting mix. Leave them on the surface: light is needed for germination. Follow the packet's temperature instructions and keep the surface moist without waterlogging it. Thin each occupied cell to one seedling, then keep the best 3 rooted plants. Acclimate them before planting out in suitable local weather. This is a seed-grown biennial plan, not a promise of flowers in the sowing year.

YOUR EVERYDAY ROUTINE

Water & fertilizer at a glance.

WATER WHEN

Check new root balls and nearby soil. Water slowly as the upper 1–2 inches begin drying, before roots dry through. Wait if wet.

FERTILIZER

Finished compost only if the bed needs organic matter; no routine branded feed

AMOUNT

Optional 1-inch compost layer

WHAT THAT AMOUNT COVERS

Up to about 1½ cubic feet across the whole 6 × 3 ft bed, leaving crowns uncovered. This is a whole-bed amount, not a dose for each plant.

HOW OFTEN TO FEED

Spring, if needed. No routine liquid feeding in a reasonably fertile bed.

WHEN TO START OR PAUSE

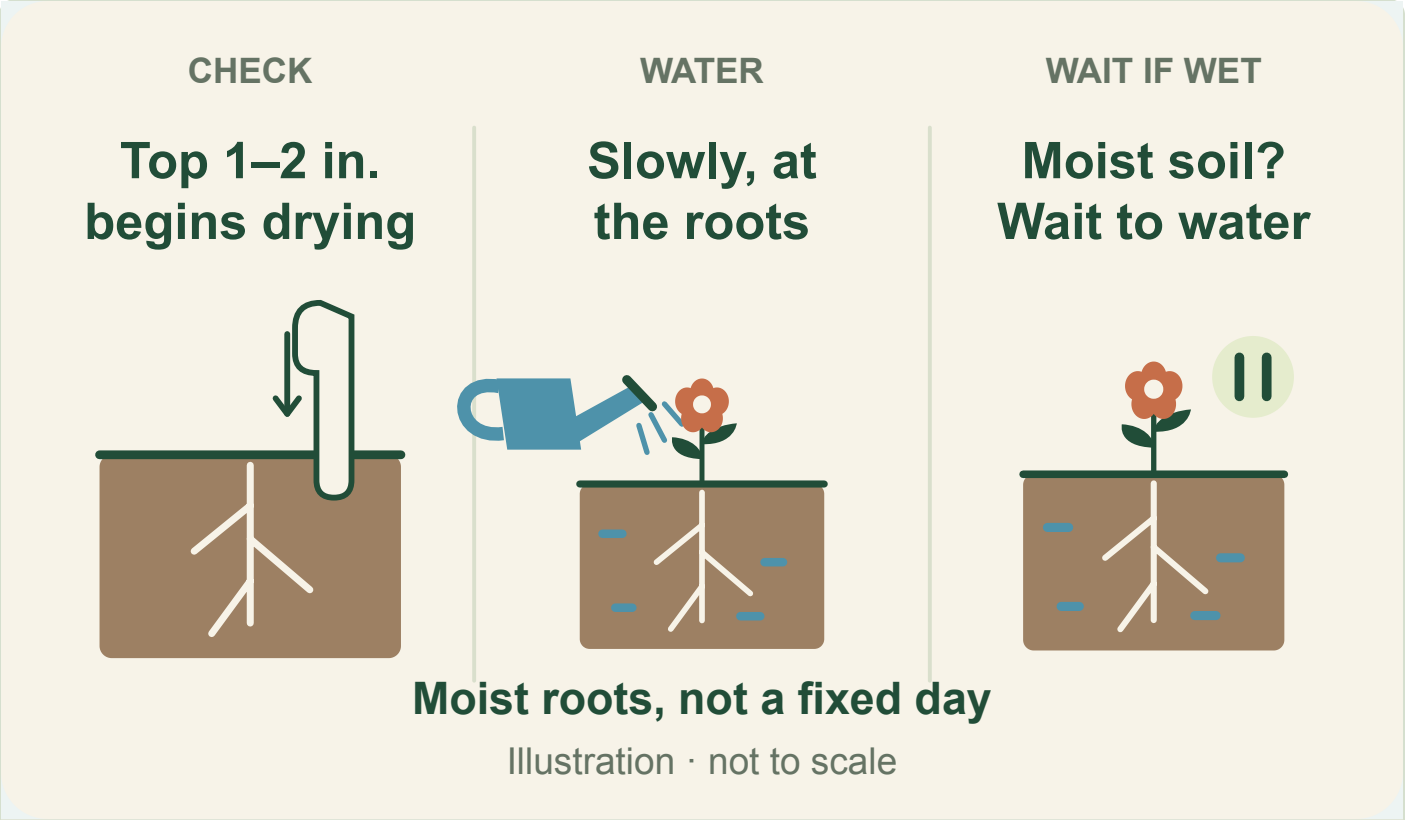
Skip compost where organic matter is already adequate. If growth stays weak after checking conditions, use a soil test for any additional nutrients.

The compost volume is calculated for this bed. Poor soil may need a different feeding plan.

01 / EVERYDAY CARE

When to water.

For the first few months, check the original nursery root balls as well as the soil beside them. In hot or dry weather, check daily. Feel under mulch: when the upper 1–2 inches begin drying and the root-ball area is no longer moist, water slowly around the roots. Do not wait for the whole root ball to dry out. Wait if it is still wet. Once roots have spread into the bed, extra water is mainly needed during extended dry spells. Water at soil level and keep the crown—the point where leaves meet roots—out of soggy soil.



Check before watering. Check new root balls and nearby soil. Water slowly as the upper 1–2 inches begin drying, before roots dry through. Wait if wet. Original illustration; not to scale.

> **The easy rule**
>
> Check first. Water only when the plant needs it.

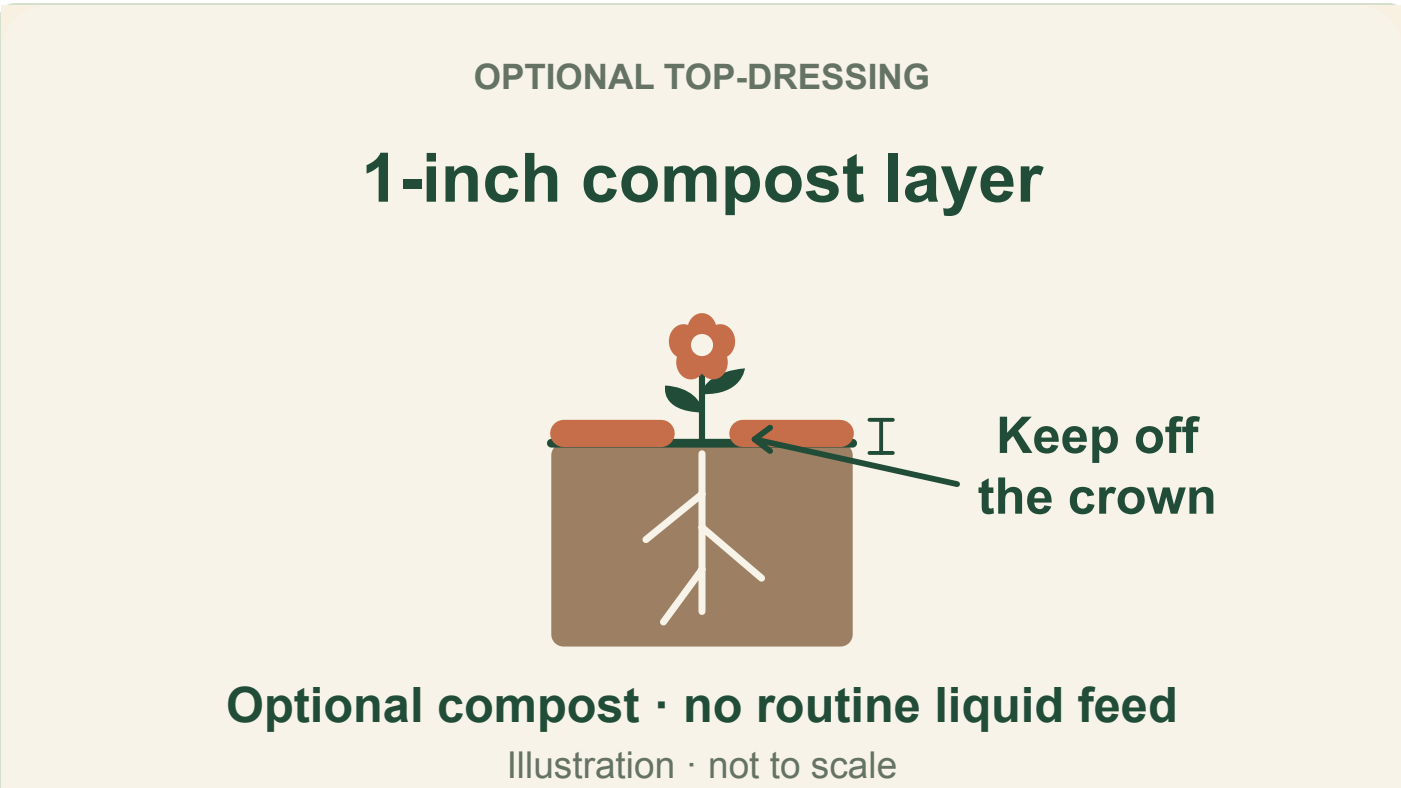
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02 / PLANT FOOD

Exactly what to feed it.

Buy no routine liquid fertilizer for this reasonably fertile garden bed. If it needs organic matter, spread an optional 1-inch layer of finished compost in spring, keeping every crown uncovered. Across the whole 6 × 3 ft bed, that is at most about 1½ cubic feet before leaving gaps around the plants; it is not that amount per plant.

OPTIONAL TOP-DRESSING



Optional 1-inch compost layer Up to about 1½ cubic feet across the whole 6 × 3 ft bed, leaving crowns uncovered. This is a whole-bed amount, not a dose for each plant. Spring, if needed. No routine liquid feeding in a reasonably fertile bed. Skip compost where organic matter is already adequate. If growth stays weak after checking conditions, use a soil test for any additional nutrients. Original illustration; not to scale.

THE SIMPLE FEEDING PLAN

Start without extra fertilizer.

This no-extra-feed start is for a fertile bed, not a claim that foxgloves never need nutrients. RHS notes that poor soils can benefit from fertilizer. If growth stays weak after light, water and drainage are corrected, get a soil test and follow its product and amount recommendations. Extra feeding will not reliably turn an ordinary first-year leaf rosette into a flowering plant.

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03 / WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

First- and second-year growth

Ordinary foxgloves usually make a leaf rosette in year one and tall bells in late spring or early summer of year two. Many spikes reach 3–4 ft. These are biennials or short-lived perennials, so a plant may die after flowering.

Planting and checking local suitability

Plant nursery starts in moderate spring conditions, after gradually acclimating greenhouse-grown plants. Give afternoon shade in hot regions. Check local Extension advice before choosing foxglove or allowing seedlings to spread: Digitalis purpurea naturalizes readily and can be unwanted outside gardens in some places.

For regional planting windows, find your local Cooperative Extension office ↗.

Something looking off?

I only have a low circle of leaves. Is something wrong?

Often not: an ordinary Digitalis purpurea can spend its first year as a rosette. Check the label before expecting flowers—'Foxy' is a named first-year-flowering exception. Also check crowding: leaves need room to expand, and a cramped plant can take longer to flower. Do not add fertilizer just because a healthy young plant has no spike.

Why is it wilting?

Check both the original root ball and the soil around it. If the root ball is drying, water slowly at its base. If it is already wet, hold extra water and check drainage. Persistent wilt in wet soil needs closer investigation; adding plant food will not fix it.

The leaves have a powdery coating. Should I remove them?

Foxglove leaves naturally have soft pale hairs; do not remove healthy leaves just because they look fuzzy. New white, dusty patches that spread may be powdery mildew. Reduce crowding, keep roots from drying out, and ask local Extension to confirm an uncertain diagnosis before removing large amounts of foliage or choosing a treatment.

Handling safely and managing seedlings

Keep poisonous plants away from children and pets

All parts are highly poisonous if swallowed. Choose a different plant where children or pets may chew it, and keep seeds and cut stems out of reach. Wear gloves when handling foxgloves; the leaves can irritate sensitive skin. This is an ornamental, not a home-medicine plant.

Decide whether to remove spent flower spikes

Removing every spent spike prevents the next crop of seeds, so plan to buy or raise replacements if the old plants die. Only allow self-seeding where locally appropriate, and remove unwanted young plants before they spread. Do not expect a permanent clump or use a division routine meant for a different perennial Digitalis species.

Help with your next step.

Choose your first plant

You are still deciding between garden flowers, food plants, and an indoor plant.

Compare one-pot starter plans

Compare four edible container projects if you want to grow food instead of starting a flower bed.

BEHIND THIS GUIDE

Where the advice comes from.

Plant care is based on the sources below. Planting layouts and beginner routines combine that guidance into one practical plan; they are editorial choices, not results from a Plant Care Steps growing trial.

- Wisconsin Extension: common foxglove life cycle and care ↗
  https://hort.extension.wisc.edu/articles/common-foxglove-digitalis-purpurea/
- NC State: foxglove growth and toxicity ↗
  https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/digitalis-purpurea/
- RHS: foxglove growing guide ↗
  https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/foxglove/growing-guide
- Maryland Extension: caring for garden flowers ↗
  https://www.extension.umd.edu/resource/care-annuals-and-perennials
- Iowa State: planting perennials ↗
  https://yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu/how-to/how-plant-perennials
- ASPCA: foxglove and pets ↗
  https://www.aspca.org/pet-care/aspca-poison-control/toxic-and-non-toxic-plants/foxglove
- RHS: distinguishing powdery mildew and reducing plant stress ↗
  https://www.rhs.org.uk/disease/powdery-mildews

Something needs updating? Suggest a correction

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Compiled with AI assistance. These first-edition guides have not yet had an independent horticultural review. Read our editorial approach.