

THE COLORFUL COUSIN OF MUMS, MARIGOLDS AND ZINNIAS

The **Transvaal Daisy** or *gerbera* is a colorful relative of mums, marigolds, and zinnias. Like a floral sunburst in white, yellow, pink, orange or red, to see a gerbera in its full glory will convince you to plant some of these colorful tender perennials. Originally native to South Africa, this flower from the sunflower family does well in our Southwest Florida climate.

From four to seven inches in diameter, gerbera daisies come in a variety of color and petal forms. As mentioned above, gerberas produce clear, brilliant, almost florescent flowers in shades of white, pink, red, orange and yellow. The center of each flower or “eye” also adds color in dark red, black, brown or green. The variety of petal arrangements adds interest to gerberas as well. The rows of petals are

manifest as single, double, crested and even quilled forms. The flowers are held above a clump of hairy 10-inch long leaves. Hardy down to 30°F, frost can damage gerberas and some protection may be needed during the winter months.

Most garden centers carry a wide selection of gerberas. Seeds are also available from catalogs and can offer an inexpensive way to propagate multiple plants. Grow seedlings in small pots until they are big enough to plant into flowerbeds.

The ideal gerbera planting site has morning sun and

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afternoon shade. Excellent drainage is essential and raised beds are highly recommended. The soil should be sandy with a generous addition of organic matter such as compost or peat moss. Space the plants at 12 to 18-inch intervals making sure that the crown of the plant is even with or slightly above the soil line. This effort is crucial so that the crown can dry out sufficiently to prevent rots from developing. As gerberas grow, the crown will actually begin to sink into the soil predisposing the plant to crown rot. This being the case, dig and divide your gerberas every two years so that crown rot can be avoided. Dividing gerbera clumps is great way to multiply your plant stock and expand your flowerbed. By care-

fully using pruning shears, crowns can be divided removing any dead roots and leaves. Also, remove one-half of all of the crown leaves before replanting. Replant these divisions immediately and keep them well watered until established.

Gerberas like their nutrients and appreciate a slow-release fertilizer recommended for flowering perennials two to three times during the growing season as per label instructions. A supplemental micronutrient foliar spray application will help with any deficiencies experienced.

Gerberas are not free of pests. I have experienced infestations of thrips and powdery mildew on my gerberas. Call our office for suggestions on controlling these common pests.

In addition to gerberas being excellent subjects for the flowerbed, they also make great long-lasting cut flowers. Many bouquets at florist shops these days contain a gerbera or two to make stunning arrangements. Try some gerberas in your garden and get ready to be awed by the flower show!

Resources:

-Tjia, B., Black, R.J. & Brown, S.P. (2008) *Gerberas for Florida*. UF/IFAS Extension Service.

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For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Turner, at 764.4351 or email Allison.Turner@CharlotteFL.com. Allison can help educate you about the FYN Program so you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.

**contact a
MASTER GARDENER**
on the Plant Lifeline from 1:00pm-4:00pm Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 764.4340 or by email Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com.

You can also visit them at one of our many **Plant Clinics** around the county:
<http://charlotte.ifas.ufl.edu/PlantClinics.pdf>



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