

Z IS FOR ZINNIA

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REM-07232009-028

I like to grow annual flowers like marigolds, cosmos, globe amaranths, and portulaca for my front yard. Annual flowers allow you to take a relatively inexpensive pack of seeds and grow many plants economically. While annual flowers are by their very name “annual” and go from seed to peak flowering and then decline as they produce seed and finish their lifecycle, they offer color and variety to planting beds. One annual flower that I am going to try in late summer/early fall is the zinnia. Like many annual flowers, the zinnia offers a wide range of color, size and texture to the landscape.

Just like many plants, zinnias were named after a real person, Dr. Johann Gottfried Zinn, who first described this plant. Originally from Mexico, zinnias became really popular in the 1920’s as breeding brought color, size and form to flower gardens everywhere. Zinnia breeding continued with the addition of disease resistance, low maintenance and increased tolerance to heat and humidity. Selection of zinnias depends on your taste and particular needs.

You can choose from so many diverse forms – at least 100 cultivars in fact! Zinnias have growth habits from three to four foot tall giants to dwarfs of eight inches which can be used as temporary groundcovers.

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Orange Zinnias (Asteraceae)



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July 23, 2009

There are single, semi-double and double petaled types. Some have a beehive-shaped flower; 'Small World Cherry' is an example. A more flattened form is called a button-type. There are also dahlia-flowered types that are large and make good cut flowers. Some tall zinnias include 'Ruffles', 'Splendor' and 'State Fair'. A good dwarf type is 'Thumbelina'. Mid-sized zinnias have nice cultivars such as 'Rose Pinwheel' and 'Starlight'. The colors are also magnificent ranging from char-treuse to purple with everything in-between from yellow, pink, white, cherry, orange, scarlet and even bi-colors.

While you can purchase grown, ready-to-plant zinnia transplants, they are very easy to start from seed. Zinnias can be grown in pots and transplanted, but they are just as easy to sow directly in

planting beds. Plant the seeds in rows or groups covering them with about a half-inch of soil. Zinnia seeds will germinate in about a week and grow rapidly. Once the seedlings are large enough to become crowded, thin the plants so that there is good air circulation. Space plants according to the ultimate size of the plants – tall zinnias up to 18 inches, and dwarf zinnias about eight inches. Very tall zinnias grown for cutting may need to be staked for extra support.

Zinnias are relatively low maintenance and easy to care for. Water as needed (and as allowed) and try to keep moisture off the leaves to help reduce disease. Fertilize with a liquid fertilizer about two times during their growing season. Regularly deadhead old flowers to encourage new blooms. Take advantage of the cut flower qualities of zinnias. Bouquets of cut zinnias will last about a week.

Try some different zinnias in your garden for the benefits of landscape color and abundant indoor bouquets.

Resources:

- Lewis, E. (2000) Zinnia Fact Sheet. National Garden Bureau, Inc.
- Gilman, E.F. (2007) Zinnia spp. UF/IFAS Extension Service.
- Christman, Steve (2004) Zinnia elegans. 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.

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