

CONSIDER COSMOS IN YOUR FLOWER UNIVERSE

One bedding annual flower that I have really had good success with in Charlotte County has been Cosmos. This annual flowering plant comes in many sizes, shapes and colors. Originally from the southwestern United States and Mexico, Cosmos are not only sun-lovers, but also do well in our sandy, low fertility soils.

The Common Cosmos or *Cosmos bipinnatus* is the type most often offered in seed catalogs and garden centers. This Cosmos can grow from three to six feet in height and has fine thread-like leaves. Cosmos plants tend to be very open and sprawling with weak stems that sometimes need support in the form of stakes. Large growing Cosmos provide excellent cut flowers and can be used in the landscape as long as you stake them. Early pinching can help somewhat as this helps promote a bushier and denser plant.



There is generally an excellent selection of Common Cosmos at your local seed rack or catalog. Some cultivars to look for are included in the various "series" such as Imperial Pink, Sensation, Sonata and Vega. 'Sea Shells' actually has curled petals that produce unique, tube-like shapes. Some Common Cosmos cultivars even have double petals.

Another species of Cosmos, *Cosmos sulphureus*, is also available. Also called the Orange Cos-

mos, it has orange and yellow flowers. The foliage of this Cosmos is a bit more feathery than the Common Cosmos. I tend to favor the orange flowering types and have tried both dwarf ('Cosmic Orange') and large varieties such as 'Bright Lights'.

While you may be able to find some started plants at local garden centers, I most often locate seed packs of selected Cosmos to start my own plants from seed. Cosmos are extremely easy to start from seed either as transplants or planted directly from seed just where you want them. In fact, Cosmos are often found in wildflower mixes and I have seen them planted along highways in colorful

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swaths generally of pink, lavender, and white colors. Cosmos can reseed themselves and this makes them ideal for those looking to establish a "mini-meadow". The site you select for your cosmos planting should be in full sun; well-drained, but of low fertility. Too much fertilizer will actually cause the plant to produce foliage at the expense of flowers. Cosmos seeds will germinate in as little as one week. From seed to the first bloom, Cosmos will take from eight to twelve weeks. Plant or thin Cosmos to about 18 inches apart for best growth.



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With bright and easy-to-grow flowers and ability to thrive in difficult growing conditions, all types of Cosmos belong in your garden!

Resource:

Gilman, E.F. (1999) *Cosmos bipinnatus* 'Sonata White'. UF/IFAS Extension Service.

Scheper, J. (2005) *Cosmos bipinnatus*. Floridata.com - Tallahassee, Florida

Scheper, J. (2003) *Cosmos sulphureus*. Floridata.com - Tallahassee, Florida

For information on common flowering annuals and perennials suitable for growing in our area, please contact our Master Gardeners on the Plant Lifeline at 941.764.4340 from 1:00pm-4:00pm Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Our office is located at 25550 Harbor View Road, Suite 3, in Port Charlotte.

MONTHLY PLANT CLINICS ARE SATURDAYS FROM 9:00AM-12:00PM.

- **Powell's Nursery** 1st Saturday of month
- **Peachland Publix** 2nd Saturday of month
- **Home Depot (Punta Gorda, Port Charlotte, Englewood)** 3rd Saturday of month
- **Lowes** 4th Saturday of month

PLANT CLINICS AVAILABLE ACROSS THE COUNTY:

- **Demonstration Garden** (6900 Florida Street, PG) Thursdays 9:00am-11:00am.
- **Englewood/Charlotte Public Library** Thursdays 10:00am-1:00pm.
- **Mid-County Regional Library** 1st and 3rd Thursday of month 1:00pm-3:00pm.
- **Punta Gorda Library** 2nd and 4th Wednesday of month from 10:00am-1:00pm.
- **Edison College Learning Resources Library** 3rd Tuesday of month 1:00pm-4:00pm.
- **South Gulf Cove Learning Garden** (13577 Blake Drive, PC) 3rd Wednesday of month from 9:00am-12:00pm.

Ralph Mitchell (Ralph.Mitchell@charlottetfl.com) is the County Extension Director/Horticulture Agent for Charlotte County Extension Service. Contact a volunteer Master Gardener from 1:00pm-4:00pm Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 941.764.4340 or by email (Master.Gardener@charlottetfl.com).

For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Steele, at 941.764.4351. Allison can help educate you about the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program so that you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.