

September 9, 2020



Summer When It Sizzles
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When the heat of summer has taken a toll on both plants and people, there is one plant that thrives on heat and full sun and gives us a beautiful show of tropical colored blooms. *Zinnia spp.*, a member of the sunflower family, aren't particularly bothered by hot weather as long as they are planted in good soil and are watered and fertilized regularly. An additional bonus to the many different colored blooms: Four-footed animals are not usually interested in grazing on zinnias, but pollinators like butterflies, bees and hummingbirds love them. Sounds like a perfect plant!

Native to Mexico, zinnias are tough little plants that handle our hot summers well. Zinnias come in all colors but true blue and offer many floral types, with petals that can be quill-shaped, cactus-shaped, pompon-like, and some that look like daisies. A perfect cutting garden plant, they look especially nice with companion plants like salvia, marigolds, dahlias, asters and petunias. A striking combination in the garden are zinnias and black-eyed Susans (*Rudbeckia spp.*).

Zinnias are easily grown from seed, but if you didn't plant zinnias seeds this past spring and would still like to add them to your garden this season, seedlings are readily available at most nurseries.

For a taller, back-of-the-border plant, *Zinnia elegans*, or common zinnia, is an old garden favorite. This bushy plant grows 1 to 3 feet tall and offers varieties with single petals, double petals, and even cactus-like petals whose edges roll back along part of their length, giving them a spikey look. *Zinnia augustifolia*, or narrow-leaf zinnia, is a compact species with a daisy-like flower growing only 8 to 16 inches tall. *Zinnia haageana*, Mexican zinnias, are the flashiest of

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the zinnias, with double and semi-double petals in mahogany red with golden tips growing up to 2 feet tall.

Zinnias suffer from few diseases, but the most common disease is powdery mildew. Powdery mildew is a fungal disease that can be easily spotted, as the symptoms are quite distinctive. Infected plants display white powdery spots on leaves and stems. This disease can be avoided by watering at the base of the plant, rather than overhead watering. Spacing the plants to encourage good air circulation and watering early in the day allows the leaves to dry out, leaving them less susceptible to powdery mildew.

Zinnias are annuals and will die each fall at the first frost. But not to fret; saving zinnia seeds is a good way to start next year's plants. As old flower heads dry, remove spent blooms and harvest the arrow-head shaped seeds from between the petals. Store them in a cool, dry place during the winter months and plant them in the ground the following spring when the danger of frost has passed and the soil has warmed up. Many zinnia seeds are sold as mixes, so you won't have to worry about seedlings being identical to the parent plant.

Victorian gardeners often used flowers as symbols to express their feelings. In the language of flowers, the zinnia is "for one whose heart is full of thoughts of absent friends." With that sentiment in mind, a small bouquet of zinnias, left at the door of a friend, would be a welcome gift in this time of isolation.

Master Gardeners are doing our best to continue to offer gardening classes despite restrictions related to COVID-19. A five-part online class series, Gardening in a Changing Climate, will be held on Wednesdays from 3:00 to 4:30 PM beginning September 9, and on September 12, another online class, Summer Fruit Tree Pruning, will be held from 9:00 to 11:00 AM.. Please go to http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Public_Education_Classes/?calendar=yes&g=56698 for registration instructions and to see all upcoming online classes.

Currently we are in phase 2 resumption of activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Master Gardener events will for the foreseeable future be limited. Please see our calendar of events for learning opportunities. We realize our public classes are valued by county residents and we especially appreciate your continued support and understanding during this public health challenge.

We do have some good news--the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, is open to the public, from 9 AM to noon on Fridays and Saturdays. State and county public health guidelines require us to limit visitors to ten at a time (including our docents) and ask that they practice social distancing and wear face coverings. Restrooms will not be open. Check http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration_Garden for more information. Have a gardening question? Master Gardeners are working hard remotely and can still answer your questions. Leave a message on our office telephone: 530-621-5512, or use the "Ask a Master Gardener" option on our website: mgeldorado.ucanr.edu. We'll get back to you! Master Gardeners are also on Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest.

Stay safe and follow recommended health and sanitation practices in the coming weeks.

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For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see [http://ucanr.edu/master gardener e-news](http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news).