

**Friday's Feature****By****Theresa Friday**

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**Zinnias are still great flowers for sunny locations**

Zinnias bring back memories of grandmothers' gardens and cheerful bouquets. With their dependability and dizzying array of flower colors and heights, zinnias easily earn their excellent reputation.

Since all zinnias require at least six hours of direct sun, choose a site that receives full sunlight. Amend your planting bed with generous amounts of organic material such as compost or manure. Be sure to till the amendments into the soil to a depth of six to eight inches.

Lime is sometimes needed to raise the pH of our locally acid soils. The ideal pH range for zinnias is between 6.3 and 6.8. Use lime only when the need is determined by a soil test.

Zinnias are one of the easiest annuals to grow from seed. Plant seeds about one-fourth of an inch deep. Germination is rapid at temperatures above 80 degrees F., requiring only three to five days. Plants are usually spaced six to eighteen inches apart, depending on the cultivar. Overcrowding zinnias can lead to problems with diseases and should be avoided.

Water the plants as needed, especially when they are young. Zinnias are quite drought tolerant once established.

Regular applications of a complete fertilizer will aid in growth and flower development. Fertilize lightly once a month, or often enough to keep plants growing vigorously, but don't overdo it. Excessive amounts of nitrogen fertilizer can have negative effects.

About twenty zinnia species are recognized today, but only three or four are commonly grown.

The common zinnia, or *Zinnia elegans*, is the most widely known. It has the widest range of flower colors. It basically comes in every color except true blue, brown or black. This species has many different flower forms including single, double and “cactus-flower” types.

The common zinnia requires regular deadheading and consistent moisture to bloom continuously throughout the summer. If not planted in a sunny location with good air circulation, plants are often affected by powdery mildew.

The narrowleaf zinnia, or *Zinnia angustifolia*, is a smaller species with narrow leaves and is known for its durability in the garden. It has small daisy-like yellow, orange, and white flowers with orange centers. Its legendary heat tolerance, however, more than makes up for the limited palette of flower colors and plant heights.

The ‘Profusion’ series of zinnias are rapidly gaining popularity among home gardeners. They are hybrids between old cut flower-type zinnias and the narrowleaf zinnias. The flower and foliage are smaller than the old cut flower-type zinnias but larger than the narrowleaf zinnias.

Profusion zinnias are available in several colors. Profusion White, Orange and Cherry have been around a few years; Profusion Fire and Profusion Apricot were introduced in 2004.



There are other new Profusion zinnias that will hit the market in 2007. One is Profusion Coral Pink. It looks just as its name suggests, possibly with more emphasis on the pink than the coral. There is also a new Profusion Double Cherry. It has the cherry red of the original but is double-petaled.

Zinnias make cheerful cut flowers that can last a week or more indoors in vases. Cut the blooms when the centers are beginning to fully open. Remove the lower leaves and immediately plunge the cut ends into water.

Double flowers are best for drying because they tend to hold their shape better than single forms. All colors will change slightly after drying. Cut stems when flowers are

at their peak, remove leaves, and hang upside down in bundles out of direct light.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

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