**Primetime**

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**Annual Flowers For The Summer**

Your cyclamen, snapdragons, pansies, and other cool weather flowers decline quickly when the weather warms up. To maintain color in your landscape you may want to begin planting some of the summer annuals now so they will be in full bloom this summer.

Semperflorens begonias are a top color plant for the summer garden. We think of them as a shade plant but they survive most summers in good shape in the sun if they are planted early into well prepared soil.

Begonias do not provide cut flowers but grow to 10 inches tall if planted on one foot centers they provide a solid bed of color through their decorative foliage and small pink, white, or light red flowers. The foliage is shiny and thick with bronze or green coloring depending on the selection you choose.

Deer eat begonias and so do slugs and snails but they are more drought tolerant than zinnias. Protect them from slugs and snails with a bait labeled for the purpose. Some mild winters begonias can survive to provide color for a second year.

Zinnias are the mainstay for summer color in many summer gardens. There are many selections to choose from and they can be planted by seed or transplants.

The Dreamland transplant is my favorite zinnia. The flowers are borne or sturdy plants that grow to about 18 inches tall and nearly as wide. The flowers are 3 to 4 inches in diameter and have a relatively round shape. Dreamland blooms in yellow, off-white, pink, lavender, and red. They make very good cut flowers. In fact if you don’t harvest the blooms for the house, deadhead the spent flowers as soon as they begin to decline. The action disappoints the seed eating birds but helps the plant producing new flowers rather than concentrating on seed production.

Dreamland will readily reseed but the flowers that result show the wide variation of the percentage of the Dreamland hybrid. The colors are not as intense and the blooms are not as uniform. The one good thing about the reseeded Dreamlands is that they are even more popular as a nectar source for the butterflies and hummingbirds.

Lilliput is a small zinnia (10 inches) that is available as a transplant. Among varieties that can be planted by seed are the cactus and California Giant selections. Wild seed farms at Fredericksburg produces large quantities of zinnia seed in mixed or single colors for large plantings. Visit their website at “[www.wildseedfarms.com](http://www.wildseedfarms.com)”.

Plant all zinnias in full sun. Allow 1.5 to 2 feet apart plants for the large varieties. Grasshoppers will sometimes eat zinnias but the usual pest that ends a particular plants life is mildew. You may want to have 2 plantings of zinnias to fill the entire summer through Thanksgiving blooming season.

In my neighborhood deer do not usually eat zinnias.

In most regions of the country marigolds are a favorite summer flower. They are available at San Antonio nurseries in several selections and sizes as well, but I hesitate to use them because of their proclivity for spider mites. There is a much better chance of a long season of marigold blooms if they are planted in late July or August when temperatures begin their downward trend and spider mite reproduction is declining.

It may be worth planting marigolds despite the expectation of spider mites if you have a section of garden that is infested with nematodes. Planting marigolds very close together in such an area reduces nematode populations.

For hanging baskets and low growing flowers consider purslane and moss rose for summer in full sun. They only grow to 6 inches tall and spread to cover 12 to 18 inches in diameter. Select from pink, white, yellow, orange, lavender, and bi-color blooms. One problem with moss roses and purslane is that the blooms only open in mid morning and close in early evening. Despite the short bloom period the plants are decorative the rest of the day because of the foliage. Moss rose has torpedo shaped fleshy leaves and purslane has mouse shaped succulent-like leaves. Both of these plants are water efficient. Grow them in full sun.

Caladiums grow from a bulb. Some caladium can tolerate full sun but most are shade plants. The leaves are variations of a triangular shape that grow on the end of thin stalks. Foliage varies from light green to maroon. Many different shades and bi-color versions are available.

Caladiums are sensitive to cool wet soils. To prevent rot they are best planted in May or later in the summer.