

Zinnias

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Zinnias are the top flower for the San Antonio summer garden. They prosper in the heat and full sun to produce colorful blooms from April 1 to Thanksgiving. Bloom colors include red, yellow, cream, orange, lavender, pink, gold, bicolor and even green. There are a number of different zinnia species on the market and a large selection of hybrids.

Although they are heat tolerant, zinnias are not xeriscape plants. They do best if they are irrigated twice/week all summer with drip irrigation. The other main cultural challenge is powdery mildew. A selling point for hybrids on the retail market is that they are more resistant to mildew than the old fashioned zinnias like California Giant.

The most common zinnia sold at area nurseries is the hybrid Dreamland. It grows to about 16 inches tall and has a tightly packed mound shaped 5 inch bloom with bright colors. Lilliput is a small zinnia (8inches tall) that has a 2inch bloom. The old-fashioned varieties, California Giant and Cactus are grown easily from seed to reach 3ft tall. Some of the dahlia flowered mixes are even taller. All are of the species, *Zinnia elegans*.

Zinnia angustifolia var. *linearis* is a sprawling small flowered zinnia available in yellow, gold, and white that is described as being drought tolerant and mildew resistant.

Profusion is a medium sized zinnia that produces more colors and larger blooms than *linearis*. The variety is a *Z. elegans*/*Z. angustifolia* cross which is also less susceptible to mildew and more drought tolerant than the *Z. elegans* varieties. Each year new colors of Profusion zinnias are available on the market. This year Peterson Bros wholesale nursery reports that it is a new red.

Zinnias are a favorite summer annual for a number of reasons beyond the showy blooms.

They are among the top two or three nectar sources for butterflies and hummingbirds. A planting of zinnias will be frequented by swallowtails, monarchs, gulf fritillaries, queens, and many other species of butterflies. Grow California Giants or Cactus by seed or allow the hybrid varieties like Dreamland to drop their seed and regrow as the parent plants for superior nectar sources.

Zinnias make excellent cut flowers over a long season. The blooms lasted until mid-December last year. Dreamland produces a very spectacular bloom on a medium length stem, or include some seeded California Giants and Cactus zinnias for longer stem bouquets.

If you allow zinnias to go to seed, the spent flowers are a favorite food source for cardinals, goldfinches and other seedeaters. In some neighborhoods deer do not eat zinnias.

The other top nectar producing flowers for butterflies are mistflower, tropical milkweed, porter weed, and duranta. If you grow them in the same landscape with zinnias you will have many butterflies to enjoy.

Other annuals for summer color to consider are Cora vinca, moss rose, and purslane for the garden in the sun. In the shade use Semperfloren begonias, Whopper begonias, coleus, and caladium. Vincas are not eaten by the deer.