



Helping your *Zinnias* thrive

PHOTO BY MSU EXTENSION SERVICE/GARY BACHMAN

Cactus-flowers zinnias such as this Inca are very different from traditional zinnias. Each flower displays masses of thin, almost needle-like petals that come in a range of long-lasting flower colors.

Question: I love zinnias but have not had good luck with them. Mine aren't as bushy or productive as I know they can be. Any tips for me to try before I just give up?

Answer: Don't give up yet! You will be rewarded with a beautiful and plentiful crop of zinnias if you just follow some basic care rules.

Zinnias are easy to grow and also deer resistant. They do well in flower beds, vegetable gardens and pots. They are easy to grow from seed – I recommend that over buying them already growing from a garden store.

If you do decide to buy seedlings or grow your own seedlings, use caution when transplanting them. Zinnias do not like their roots to be



Margo Roten
Ask a Master Gardener

disturbed.

Plant in full sun, in well-draining soil when the outside temperature is around 55 degrees or above. Space the seeds 4-6 inches apart and ¼ inch deep. Keep soil wet until they sprout. After the seedlings emerge, thin them to between 6-18 inches apart (depending upon the variety). This is important to allow good airflow between plants.

Zinnias are prone to powdery mildew, so spacing and correct watering procedures

are key to discouraging that. To get them off to a good start, use compost or fertilize at planting time. Some growers feel it is not necessary to keep fertilizing them while others keep theirs on a fertilizing schedule of 10-10-10 (indicates 10% nitrogen, 10% phosphate and 10% potash).

Water plants at the roots to avoid unnecessary water on the foliage and flowers. Pinch back seedlings above two sets of leaves. This is difficult to do, but you will be rewarded with bushy, prolific plants. Failure to do this results in one tall plant producing only one bloom.

Before the plants are too big, place some type of support next to the flowers. Wooden stakes and garden string, a wire grid, or small fences work very well.

Do not harvest before the flower is fully open. Zinnias will not open more after they are cut. Select the flower you want to harvest then place your hand about 15 inches below the flower and give it a light shake. If the flower and stem are floppy, it is not quite ready. When it is ready, it will feel and look firm.

Cut the stem at a diagonal and strip all leaves and other buds from the flower. Place stem immediately in a bucket of water.

If you prefer to enjoy your flowers in the garden, dead head the flowers when spent. The continual harvesting of flowers encourages more flowers. Water regularly, making sure the water reaches the entire root zone. Placing mulch around the flowers (not touching the stems) will

help the soil retain moisture.

Some advantages of growing zinnias are the attraction of pollinators to your garden. Also, the flowers are edible and make a beautiful addition to a charcuterie tray and other food displays.

There are so many types, shapes, colors and sizes of zinnias that choosing which ones to grow is the most difficult thing about them!

Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.