

Bell County Master Gardeners
Tip of the Week
By Jann Dworsky
Zinnias: Butterfly Magnets

Zinnias are a perfect and easy choice for your first flower garden. They love the hot Bell County weather and do best when planted April through late August, or even right now.

Zinnias come in every glorious crayon color, plus peppermint, tequila lime and many others. They also come in several sizes, so pick the one to suit your space. Thumbelina zinnias are only 6 inches tall, others are 24 or 36 inches tall, but butterflies love them all! My Aunt Callie always grew zinnias and they made a wonderful welcome bouquet to neighbors. I have planted them more than any other flower over the last 40 years.

At this time of year, zinnias take only a few days to come up. Pick a spot that is in full sun for at least 6 hours of the day. You will have a beautiful garden of color even if you only have a 2-foot by 2-foot garden. Spade it to a depth of about 6 or 8 inches. Pull out any grass and weeds, then work the soil with your hoe and rake until the soil looks like a good chocolate cake mix. Make a slight depression or little tank with your dirt, so the water will soak into the ground. Take your zinnia seeds and place them a few at a time on top of the dirt. Sprinkle a little of the softest dirt on them, less than one quarter of an inch. Pat the top of the ground to firm in the seed. Sprinkle twice a day to water, but gently so the seeds are not uncovered.

In a few days, with the Central Texas heat, your zinnias will be sprouted. If you cut the flowers and put them in a vase in the house, they will last nearly a week. Friends will love to receive a bouquet. Deadhead the faded flowers off the plants for long and continuous blooming. Water the zinnias by laying a hose at their feet and soaking them.

Zinnias can be purchased at local garden centers or on line through seed catalogs. Zinnias are eager to be beautiful “eye candy” and will make your first flower garden a big success. Don’t forget to watch them daily to see the multitude of butterflies that will visit your garden! The zinnia is truly a magnet for the flying swirls of color.

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask.bcmga@gmail.com

