Zinnias

We love zinnias for their bright, bold, tropical colors, and the steady stream of butterflies they bring to our gardens: monarchs, swallowtails, queens, and many more. Their long-lasting blooms also attract hummingbirds, are bee-friendly, deer-resistant, low maintenance, and make beautiful bouquets.

Some have a simple, single petal layer (looking similar to a daisy), while others have multiple layers and a few cultivars resemble dahlias. Zinnias are true American natives found in the SW United states, Mexico, and Central America. From the 20 species of native zinnia that are known, plant breeders have cultivated and hybridized hundreds of amazing flowers.

Butterflies seem mostly drawn to taller zinnia varieties with a clear yellow center, but all offer an accessible source of nectar for pollinators like butterflies and bees.

Zinnias can be grown in any zone but they need plenty of sun and well-drained soil. Once established, they're drought-tolerant, but will thrive with regular watering. Try to keep water off the leaves, though as most zinnias are susceptible to powdery mildew, although newer cultivars have been bred for resistance.

Pinching back zinnias encourages fuller growth. For longer flowering, remove the old blooms. Zinnias love Florida's hot summers, and healthy plants will bloom throughout the summer and frequently through the winter.

If you start to see mildew on your zinnia leaves, slow down the spread by using an organic solution of 1 tablespoon baking soda and 1/2 tablespoon of liquid soap in 1 gallon of water. Apply the solution with a spray bottle. Test the solution on a portion of your plant first before spraying the whole plant, and it's also recommended to avoid spraying during the hottest part of the day.

Zinnias will reseed themselves, but if you'd like to save seeds for another time or place, simply leave some flowers on the stalk until dry and brown.

Zinnias don't need special care. They add a glow to our gardens. And they Make Me Smile!

Submitted by Terry Galloway