

# A Zillion Zinnias for Gilbert's 125th

To promote a colorful, creative, vibrant, growing, and lively ambience for Gilbert's upcoming quasiquintennial, the G125 planning group is encouraging Gilbert residents to plant showy plots of zinnias. We've enclosed a complimentary packet of zinnia seed from the Earl May store in south Ames. The seed is a classic variety and produces tall plants with large flowers. Because of the size of this popular variety, plant the seed in the ground and not in a planter box. You may wish to obtain your own seed or purchase young plants for fancier zinnia varieties. Whatever your choice, think a zillion zinnias.

We have provided some zinnia growing tips. The suggestions are a distillation of advice from gardeners, Anita Fincham from rural Gilbert and Wilma Lesan of CampusTown in Ames. You can find an interview with them on-line at the Gilbert Gazette. [www.gilbertgazette.com](http://www.gilbertgazette.com)

Enter the site, find the main menu, click on the G125 link, and scroll down to the zinnia section. You can listen to the interview with the master gardeners if you have RealAudio software. It's a fun discussion, not just about the techniques of growing zinnias but about why zinnias are so delightful to grow and gardening as a past-time. There are some CDs of the interview at city hall and the Daisychains and Laughs coffeebar on Main Street. You can checkout a CD in exchange for a refundable dollar bill.

Anita and Wilma say that May 10 is the frost-free date for Iowa, and it's safe to plant zinnias. So have at it, and have a good time. Here's to plenty of colorful plots and neighbors gathering to talk about their gardening success stories and surprises. Make sure to put the G125 celebration on your calendar. It will be July 30-31. Also, stop in at the Earl May store as a way of thanking the company for donating the zinnia seed. The manager's name is Mike Christiansen.

## How to Start a New Zinnia Patch

- Select a sunny location.
- Remove the sod; dig down a few inches.
- Work in some compost, manure, or potting soil to loosen the ground.
- If you're a novice and can't tell an emerging zinnia from a weed, plant the seeds in rows according to the package directions. If you can discern the difference between a young zinnia and a weed, scatter the seed for a more aesthetically pleasing plot. The seed will sprout in 7 to 10 days.
- Thin seedlings. Don't pull out the extras; cut off the ones you don't want. This will leave root systems undisturbed.

## How to Grow Zinnias in Planter Box

- Buy smaller varieties of zinnia seeds labeled "Dwarf" or "Thumbelina."
- Choose a plastic planter box with a drainage hole. (Clay container are heavy and dry out quickly.)
- Cover the hole in the bottom with a coffee filter to keep the dirt in.
- Fill the container with potting soil, rather than dirt from your yard.
- Sow seeds in rings, starting at the center, leaving several inches of space between the rings.
- Cover seeds with ¼" of fine soil and pat down lightly.
- Keep the soil moist, and set the pot in a sunny location.
- Look for the seedlings in 7 to 10 days.
- When they're 1" high, thin the plants so that they're 9" apart.

## Other Tips from Anita and Wilma

- Zinnias are REALLY EASY to grow! You can do this!
- If they're planted too close together the lack of airflow around the plants results in powdery mildew.
- If you have less than an inch of rain during a week, water your zinnias, preferably in the morning, by soaking the ground, not their leaves. Don't water too much; however, water freely during dry weather.
- Use a 10-10-10 fertilizer if you want to, but it's not necessary.
- Cut or pluck faded blooms to keep the plants flowering.
- Sit back and watch for butterflies.

If you need more advice or help, call Anita or write to the G125 Group at: [g125@globalccs.net](mailto:g125@globalccs.net). We will forward your message. Thanks Anita and Wilma. You can also call the Iowa State University horticulture hot-line at 294-3108, and the extension service has a zinnia flyer on the web at <http://www.ipm.iastate.edu/ipm/hortnews/2002/7-19-2002/zinnias.html>. Or you can get a copy of the flyer at Reiman Gardens.