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For the avid gardener

Among the many advantages of annual flower gardening with bedding plants is the instant effect of the plants and their colors on the garden design. There are many annuals from which to create this instant beauty, and one of the leaders is the zinnia. With the diversity of colors, forms and sizes of the zinnia, it would be hard for the gardener to find a sunny spot in the garden where he could not use them.

Gardeners have found that

zinnias are among the easiest of flowers to grow, succeeding in any well-drained soil and leaping into bloom almost upon planting. Little care is required except deep watering during dry weather (which should be applied to the roots, not the leaves, to discourage mildew), feeding with a fertilizer such as 5-10-5 twice during the growing season, and pulling weeds.

Plant hybridizers have had a heyday with zinnias, as they have

had with other annual flowers as well, taking a plain looking weed native to Mexico and transforming it into hundreds of varieties. Zinnia flowers may be single, double or semi-double, one to seven inches across, in solids and bicolors in every shade but blue, and with petals flat, ruffled, curled or twisted.

Plants range in size from 6-inches high for use at the front of the border, as edgings or in containers, to 36-inches high. Taller varieties do well in the background or to shield an eyesore. Any of the zinnias make excellent cut flowers for use to cheer up any room in the house.

The plant experts at Bedding Plants Inc., an educational group that disperses information on flower and vegetable gardening, advise gardeners to select hybrid varieties when choosing bedding plants for their increased vigor, higher flower production and built-in disease resistance, although these varieties may be more expensive.

New hybrids have achieved larger flowers on stockier plants. Leave room in the zinnia collec-

tion, however, for the old fashioned, fiesta-colored Mexican zinnias or the simple, refined *Zinnia angustifolia* that makes a charming ground cover.

The old adage about planning ahead is never truer than in the creation of your instant beauty garden. Before you set anything into the ground, even before you visit your garden center or greenhouse to purchase your bedding plants, set a plan for your garden.

There are several things to consider after limiting the choices to what is suitable for your light and climate conditions, the first being color. Decide upon a color scheme and choose annuals that will fit into it. Generally one dominant color is best for flower beds, perhaps with one or at the most two complimentary colors for contrast. Red, orange and yellow are warm colors and make the garden appear to be smaller than it is; blues and violets have a cooling effect and make the garden look larger. Bright colors attract the eye more than pastel and muted colors do, so choose what you use with care. You should use red or orange where you want attention drawn and not where you don't.

Flowers come in three basic plant shapes and most gardens

look good with a combination of the three. At the back of the flower bed you would place the tall, spike shaped flowers; in front of that would go the mounded forms; and in the foreground would be the flat, ground hugging types. This does not mean you have to follow this rule, for many flower beds look most attractive with one size and shape of plant. What you choose depends on your available space and your personal taste.

Many annual flowers can be used in combination with the zinnia to give instant color that lasts through frost. Most popular among these are the blue or white ageratum; white or violet sweet alyssum; shade-loving pink, red or white wax begonias; bright and bold geraniums; many-colored impatiens; sunny marigolds; cool-toned pansies; cascading petunias; bright red salvia and heat tolerant vinca and gazania.

Assistance in planning, planting and caring for your annual flower garden is available free of charge from the plant people at Bedding Plants, Inc. Send a self addressed, stamped envelope to INSTANT BEAUTY GARDENS, Bedding Plants Inc., 210 Cartwright Blvd., Massapequa Park, NY 11762 and you'll receive a tip sheet in return.

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