



Growing Zinnias as a Cut Flower

CULTURE

Soil temperature: 70 - 75 degrees optimum range

Germination days: 3-8 days

Grow on temperature day: 70 - 80 degrees

Weeks in plug trays: 3-4 weeks

Plant spread: 12 - 16 inches

Plant height: 36" - 48"

Plant type: Annual

Maturity days: 60-75 days

SITE SELECTION

Zinnias do best in areas that receive full sun and planted in well-drained soil rich in organic matter with a pH of 6.0–6.8 but can tolerate soils slightly out of this range. Grow as an annual in gardens or field settings. Container grown is not recommended for the Benary Giant series.



Fertility & Watering

Zinnias like well drained loam soils and a well balanced fertilizer such as 10-10-10 or equivalent at a rate of approx. 2 -3 pounds per 100 square feet. This rate should be adjusted based on overall soil fertility and factor in manures/composts and other nutrients. A soil test every few years will provide a benchmark to build your fertility program. Overhead irrigation is not recommended due to Zinnias being susceptible to Powdery Mildew. Drip irrigation is a better cultural practice and puts water right at the root zone and helps limit moisture on the foliage.

Weed Control

There are limited products for weed control in direct seeded Zinnias. Growers that direct seed have been successful utilizing plastic mulches as ground covers for weed suppression. Black plastic mulch can be laid either by hand or with machine - commonly in 4' wide strips. Growers then punch 2 rows of holes at least 2" diameter in a 12" x 12" x 12" pattern through the plastic mulch and transplant or sow the seed into the soil as above. Drip tape is recommended when using plastic mulches in ease of watering.

continued on next page

Zinnias can be grown from a transplant or direct sown.

From Transplant

Sow 2-3 seeds per cell in a 50 or 72 cell tray about 3 weeks before the last frost of spring in greenhouse. Soil temperature for plug trays is best in a 75-85 degree range. Once seeds emerge reduce temperature to 65-75 degrees to aid in stocky growth. Zinnias are best when hardened off slightly and acclimated to outdoor conditions at least 7 days before setting to the field/garden. Transplant seedlings to garden/field after all signs of frost have passed. Try not to allow plants to become root bound in the cells. Also, limit root disturbance when transplanting as transplant shock can cause delayed flowering and loss of yield.

Direct Sown

Prepare a seed bed at least 2 weeks before sowing seed, amend soil with compost or nutrients as you would for any typical vegetable crop. Using the stale seedbed technique, work soil one additional time immediately before planting to limit emerged seedlings and have a fresh seedbed. Sow seeds either in single shallow rows, 5-6 seeds every 12", or individual hills of 3-4 seeds about ¼" to ½" deep. Cover with fine soil and firm soil lightly to have good contact with seed and soil. Water lightly to aid soil moisture if needed to aid in germination. Once emerged thin to 3 seedlings per foot.

Pinching and Staking

Pinch out the very first center bud. This will promote lateral branching resulting in many more flowers and generally longer stems. Support is generally not used by most growers unless you have a very high fertility program which elongate the stems significantly, or your growing region is prone to high winds. Support can be as simple as running a few lines of twine parallel on each side of the row.

Harvest

Harvest blooms either mid-morning or late evening. Using a sharp shear, cut stems to desired length while maintaining enough residual plant to generate more blooms. Remove excess foliage and place stems in cool water. Store or display zinnias out of the direct sunlight to extend vase life. Zinnia stems will generally last for 5-7 days. It is recommended to use a flower food. Sanitize cutting tools and flower buckets to keep fungi and bacteria at a minimum which will extend cut flowers vase life. Deadhead spent and unused blooms while cutting flowers, this will keep plants cleaner, deter disease from forming in the unwanted blooms and promote branching and additional blooms.

