



A Seedy Start to the Season

I remember the first time I planted seeds. My mom gave me a handful of bachelor's buttons seeds that I gently poked into the soil. I impatiently checked my small piece of earth every day until bits of green finally nudged their way into sight, and I was captivated. I still marvel at those small dry particles that hold the promise of plants.

Many easy-to-grow annuals can be sown directly into the garden. Wait to plant until the soil has dried sufficiently so it crumbles instead of packs when you make a ball. Then loosen the soil at least six inches deep and amend with organic matter.

Plant the seeds according to the directions on the seed packet. Some seeds need light to germinate and if planted too deeply will never grow. Others prefer the cover of darkness and need to be covered with soil.

Whether seeds are planted in tidy rows or in generous sweeps is up to the gardener. The seeds don't care about design. Their only concern is that the soil is kept moist until they produce seedlings.

Thinning seedlings can be very difficult for gardeners, but is important to remove the smallest thinnest seedlings until the remaining are at the recommended spacing. Here are few annuals to consider planting in your garden this spring.

Amaranth

Amaranth gets its name from the Greek word *amaranthos*, which means never fading, and many species retain their color very well, making them excellent choices for dried arrangements. Amaranth comes in many forms ranging in height from two to five feet, but all love heat and humidity.

Create a fiesta in your garden with Cinco de Mayo. This variety grows three to four feet tall and its foliage can be scarlet-orange, electric yellow, magenta, or a striking combination of these.

Burgundy is a magnificent variety with burgundy plumes that grows up to eight feet tall. Plant these with sunflowers at the back of a border for a stunning late summer display.

Bishop's Lace

A relative newcomer to our

gardens, Bishop's Lace is a beautiful alternative to Queen Anne's Lace. It weaves politely through other plants in the sunny or partly sunny garden and has pure white flowers on stems up to 3 feet tall. Summer bouquets are not complete without the blooms of Bishop's Lace.

Nasturtium

Nasturtium are not only beautiful, they are also delicious. The leaves, stems, and flowers have a peppery flavor and can be used to spice up summer salads. Both the bush and vine types of Nasturtium have charming round leaves.

Alaska is a flamboyant variety—its blooms of red, yellow and orange pleasingly complement the attractive variegated foliage. These mounding plants grow 12 inches tall.

For a vine type blooming in the same colors, try Tall Climbing Single. It is an excellent vine for fences, trellises, hanging baskets, or as a ground cover.

For those preferring softer colors, Moonlight has gentle yellow blooms that grow on climbing or trailing plants.

I particularly like Vanilla Berry. It

has custard-colored blossoms with strawberry-etched throats on mounds of blue-green foliage reaching only 12 inches tall.

Love-in-a-mist

My gardens would not be without the old-fashioned charm of love-in-a-mist (Nigella). Sprinkle seeds directly into the garden and you will be rewarded with lacy blossoms in pink, blue or white, hovering over a mist of delicate, bright green foliage. After flowers are finished, interesting seed heads continue to add interest to the border. The blooms of a newer variety, Mulberry Rose, open pink and then deepen to rose as they mature.



Both the flower and seedhead of Nigella "Miss Jekyll" are pretty.

Sunflowers

If you have young children, or are still young at heart, you must grow sunflowers. With so many different varieties available, there is sure to be one that is perfect for your garden.

Choose from varieties like Container Junior – a dwarf version holding its bright friendly flowers atop 2 foot stems; Chocolate Cherry with its mouth-watering rich chocolate-burgundy flowers on six foot stems; and Sunzilla – a strong garden giant reaching up to 16 feet tall with cheerful, but commanding flowers.

Zinnias

Zinnias have continuously been among the most popular plants to grow from seed. They have long been workhorses in the summer border but have recently been bred to be resistant to powdery mildew – their biggest flaw. Try Cool Crayon Colors or Hot Crayon Colors. These varieties take the guesswork out of floral arrangements and garden design. The flowers of Cool Crayon Colors bloom in color-coordinated shades of deep lavender, carmine rose, soft pink

and white. Hot Crayon Colors bloom in harmonizing shades of scarlet red, orange and golden yellow.



Another benefit to growing zinnias in your garden: the butterflies love them!

There are many benefits from growing from seed. Seeds are an inexpensive way to get large numbers of plants; there is better availability of rare, unique, or hard-to-find heirloom plants; and you are the caretaker of your own plants from the moment your seeds are planted.

I encourage you to plant some seeds this spring; watch for those first glimpses of green; nurture them as they mature; and marvel at the promise kept.