

## Easy Flowers for Home Gardens

### Mexican aster (*Cosmos sulphureus*)

Plant seeds 1/16 in. deep, 6 in. apart or scatter on top of the soil and rake in. Grows to 2-4 ft. tall. Grows back from seed only. Flowers are golden orange. Plant in full sun. Attracts butterflies and other pollinators.

Planting dates: Spring through mid-June.



Cosmos is the Greek word for *harmony* or *an ordered universe*. Spanish priests, who grew it in their mission gardens in Mexico, gave it that name because of the evenly placed petals on the very bright and sunny flowers. It was the latest thing in gardening at that time. It originated in South America and was unknown in Europe. It is an annual (meaning that it will entirely die every winter) but will regrow from its seeds. You can collect the seeds in the fall and replant them the next spring. Seeds will sprout in 7 - 21 days when the soil temperature is warm (70 - 80 degrees F). The plants need full sun to grow best but they are drought tolerant and do well in poor soil. Blooms in approximately 50-55 days. Trim off the dead flowers to make the plants bushy and encourage more blooms.

### Smooth Phlox (*Phlox glaberrima*)

Plant seeds 1/8 in. deep, 6 in. apart or scatter on top of the soil and rake in. Grows to 2-4 ft. tall. Perennial that will re-sprout from the roots. Flowers range from white, pink, and magenta to lilac and purple. Requires moderate fertility and soil moisture. Plant in full sun to part shade.

Planting dates: Spring



Once established, Smooth Phlox will multiply and spread. Plants become tall, frothy, fragrant masses of flowers on sturdy stems in spring. After blooms fade it can be cut back to the base. Sometimes it will re-bloom in the same season. Leave some stalks to reseed if you want it to spread. Phlox is named for the Greek word for *flame*. Phlox is relatively easy to care for and makes such impressive growth and blooms within a year or two that it will encourage the beginning gardener with success. It attracts butterflies and humming birds and blooms in April and May. Most varieties of phlox are native to North America (including Missouri). They exported plants to European gardens in the 1700's where they became very popular.

### **African Marigold (*Tagetes erecta*)**

Plant seeds ¼ in. deep, 6-12 in. apart. Grows 3-4 ft. tall and 2 ft. wide. Requires medium soil moisture. Tolerates clay soil. Plant in full sun. Grows back from seed only. Flowers are deep orange and gold with gold edges.

Planting dates: late Spring once the ground has warmed.



Tagetes (the Latin name for marigolds) is named after the Etruscan god, Tages, who supposedly came out of the earth as it was plowed. The name 'marigold' comes from Mary's Gold and refers to the Virgin Mary. It is native to Mexico and Central America. This variety was the first marigold introduced to Europe and India in the 16th century. At that time, the seeds arrived from North Africa and were given the common name African marigold. Plants have a spicy-scented foliage. You can pick as many flowers as you want. Picking flowers and removing dead ones will encourage re-blooming. Bushy and deep green, this variety will form a thick hedge by mid-summer. It may require some water in the summer and support to keep it from flopping on neighboring plants. You can also just give it room and let it gracefully fill an area. Pollinating insects love it. It may repel some insect pests.

### **Love-in-a-Mist (*Nigella damascene*)**

Plant seeds 1/16 in. deep, 6 in. apart or scatter on top of the soil and rake in. Grows to a height of 18-24 in. Drought tolerant and thrives in poor soil. Grows back from seed only. Grows best in full sun. Most flowers are blue, some will be white. Planting dates: In Spring as soon as the ground can be worked.



This plant always finds a way to grow whether you give it a lot or a little care. Plant every 3-4 weeks through mid-June for succession of blooms. Save seeds to replant. It is native to the Mediterranean and was loved by the famous British gardener, artist, and writer Gertrude Jekyll. There is an all-blue variety named after her. The plant will reseed itself naturally. It likes to grow in full sun. It is special because of its blue blooms, which is rare in nature. A quote from Gertrude Jekyll: "the love of gardening is a seed that once sown never dies."

*Special thanks to Christine Gardener for these descriptions and for sharing seed from her home garden.*