

Zinnia elegans are ideal flowers for summertime

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Zowie Yellow Flame flowers are a fiery bicolor that changes as the flower opens. (Photo by MSU Extension/Gary Bachman)



[Dr. Gary R. Bachman](#)

MSU Extension Service

Now that we're fully into January, it's time to get serious about planning our gardens for 2020.

I've made a long list of vegetable, flower and herb seeds I'll be ordering in the next several weeks. Many of these will be strictly for one season.

Among the annual flowers I'm sure to get is the garden flower *Zinnia elegans*. This is the old-timey, pom-pom zinnia that I'm sure everyone's grandmother grew. It comes in lots of colors and attractive flower shapes. I'll discuss more about it later.

Today, I want to focus on two fantastic selections: Zowie Yellow Flame and the Queen series zinnias. These are *Zinnia elegans* selections with long stems that are perfect for cutting.

Zowie Yellow Flame was an All-America Selections in 2006, but don't think it's so yesterday. Its flowers are a fiery bicolor that changes as the flower opens. The multiple layers of petals open to reveal a scarlet-rose center tipped with yellow stamens; all the petals are edged in bright yellow.

The Queen series of three selections is absolutely royal in the garden.

Queen Lime zinnia is a subtle pale green infused with warm lilac. The flowers are 3 to 4 inches in diameter, and these blooms serve well as a foundation in cut flower arrangements.

Queen Lime Blush zinnia has large, 3-inch, dahlia-shaped flowers that display an incredible transition of lime green to red ombre shading with red centers.

Queen Red Lime produces maroonish-red-tinged double flowers that are crowned with lime green. The flowers are up to 3 inches across on stems up to 40 inches tall.

Zowie Yellow Flame and Queen zinnias require very little ongoing maintenance during the season. Proper fertilization is critical to maintaining the gorgeous flowers. Apply a slow-release fertilizer monthly or a water-soluble fertilizer biweekly to help keep constant levels of nutrition. Maintain a 2- to 3-inch layer of mulch to retain moisture and keep the soil cool.

Zinnias tolerate droughty weather, but the flower production is reduced, so supply supplemental irrigation during dry times. Soaker hoses or other forms of drip irrigation are really useful during the summer months and help to keep the water bill down.

These zinnias are classic cutting garden performers and have great vase life. Be sure to cut early in the morning using sharp scissors, which make clean cuts and aid in water uptake. Immediately put the cut specimens in a container of water. Add a postharvest care product to extend the life and freshness of the flowers.

Zinnias are easy to grow from seed.

A technique you can use to keep fresh flowers all season is to succession plant every three weeks. I simply sprinkle seeds in the garden, which results in a kind of cottage garden look. If you prefer, you can germinate seeds in small pots and then transplant them into specific garden locations.

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Photos for publication (click for high resolution image):

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