

Cultural Details: **Cosmos**

Several Cosmos varieties are suitable for sales in pots for use in containers and bedding displays. They make inexpensive alternatives to some of the cutting-raised 'Marguerites' and are very easy to raise, given care to avoid producing stretched plants.

Variety Selection

Sonata is a large flowered, compact variety suitable for container sales, in white, pink and carmine. Cosmos sulphureus Cosmic Series is another stocky variety, with smaller orange or yellow flowers.

A further group of varieties is suitable for the back of mixed borders, they have an unrestrained habit, reaching up to 1.5 metres in favourable conditions. These include Sensation, Pied Piper, Sea Shells, Candystripe and Daydream.

Programming the Crop

The taller varieties can be direct sown in the flowering position in April and May. Poor soil suits the plants better, as if soil is rich, plants will grow very large, producing few flowers.

Sow Sonata/Cosmic from February to April, for producing flowering plants for sale May to July.

Propagation and Growing-on

Use clean trays, bench tops and water supply to reduce disease potential. Sow the large seed (160 per gram) into large plug trays ideally to prevent root disturbance, or seedling trays. Cover seed with around 5mm of compost. Cover trays with clear or milky polythene to maintain humidity, until the first seedlings are visible. Germination takes around 4-5 days at 15-20°C.

As soon as large enough to handle (around 2-3 weeks after sowing), move into 9 or 10cm pots, and grow on cool (max 15°C) and bright. To control stretching, grow on as dry as possible until plants start to bud up and are ready for sale.

Plants can also be moved into larger containers at this point, to provide an inexpensive item for early Summer sales. Continue to grow cool and bright, without excessive watering, to maintain control over height.

Height of Cosmos can also be controlled with the use of Growth Regulators, according to the manufacturers' instructions – contact your chemical supplier for further details.

Pest and Disease

Cosmos has few pest and disease problems, if kept growing smoothly and grown in plug trays rather than seedling trays to avoid damaging the roots. Monitor the crop for signs of Aphids and spray accordingly.

Information provided for guidance only, as cultural practices and climatic circumstances vary.