

Cultural Details: **Zinnia**

Zinnias are commoner in warmer climates than in the UK, as they like plenty of sunshine, and can damp off under more gloomy British Summers. However we have seen excellent flowering displays in recent Summers at the Moles Seeds trial grounds, with masses of extremely bright flowers, and several varieties such as Profusion perform very well grown permanently in containers. Hybrid varieties such as Dreamland are ideal for pot bedding sales during the Summer.

Programming the Crop

Zinnias are fast growers – seed sown in early April will result in flowering plants in June; sowing to flowering takes around 9-12 weeks.

Propagation and Growing-on

Zinnias resent root disturbance so either sow the large seed (120 per gram) direct into a 9cm pot, or into large-celled plug trays to save on glasshouse space, moving on the plants as soon as the roots hold the compost together in the plug (don't let them get rootbound). Sow the seeds onto the surface of a free-draining, open, seed sowing compost, which should be thoroughly wetted with a suitable fungicide prior to sowing (to prevent damping-off diseases), and the trays allowed to drain. Then cover the seeds with vermiculite, and cover trays with clear or milky polythene to maintain humidity, until the first seedlings are visible. Do not over-water the young seedlings. Germination takes around 5-7 days at 18-20°C. Grow on at 15-18°C, in as bright a position as possible, to discourage stretching of the growing plants. Fertilize weekly with a moderate strength liquid feed.

Zinnias can also be direct-sown in the flowering position, in mid-May.

Growth Regulators

Growth regulators may be used (according to the manufacturers' guidelines) on Verbenas to ensure a compact habit where required for pack production.

Pest and Disease

Maintain good air movement through the crop, and water in the morning rather than the evening to keep the foliage dry and lessen attack by Botrytis. Pay good attention to glasshouse hygiene, using only fresh trays, pots, compost, water and clean bench tops to avoid damping-off diseases, and check for the presence of pests such as aphids, thrips and whitefly, spraying accordingly. Do not overwater the crop. Zinnias are susceptible to powdery mildew, spray as required to clear this up.

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