



# Zinnias, marigolds still most popular

By Earl Aronson  
special writer

**J**UST AS there are polls to rate the popularity of candidates for election to public office, there are surveys to determine the most popular flowering annuals for home gardens.

According to one poll, the top 10 are: zinnia, marigold, petunia, nasturtium, alyssum, aster, morning glory, portulaca, snapdragon and sweet pea. The results of this survey were based on seed sales figures. Petunias are first when sales of started plants are considered.

Zinnia, a native of Mexico and Central America, is among the easiest-grown annuals for seeding directly into the garden. It is available in a wide range of colors, flower forms and plant sizes. Few pests bother zinnias, but a disease called powdery mildew may attack foliage in late summer. New zinnia varieties are more mildew-resistant.

**MARIGOLD, ANOTHER** native Mexican, also is easy to plant directly

## weeder's guide

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into the garden from seed. But you'll get earlier flowering from started plants (bedding plants) or seeds started indoors. Marigolds and zinnias like full sun. A major problem of marigolds is the leaf hopper. Aster yellows or fusarium wilt also may attack them. Destroy diseased plants promptly.

Petunias, believed to be native to Argentina, have become much improved of late with regard to color and size. Because seeds are so tiny, it is best to start them indoors or to buy started seedlings. Petunias prefer sunny locations in well-drained soil. They are bothered by few pests, but may develop diseases if planted in poorly drained soil or overwatered.

When buying petunia seeds or plants, determine whether they are single, double, multiflora or grandiflora. Single blossoms have only one layer

of petals; double blossoms have two or more layers. Some fancy double varieties have wavy and frilled petal margins and resemble powder puffs.

Also easily grown are nasturtiums, which are native to Mexico and Peru. It is best to plant their large seeds directly in the garden because nasturtiums don't transplant as readily as do other flowers. Trailing and climbing varieties are available. Sometimes, black aphids attack the leaves' undersides.

**EXCELLENT FOR** edging is sweet alyssum, a low grower with a long summer flowering season. In warm climates, this Mediterranean native can be a perennial. While virtually pest-free, sweet alyssum may be attacked by flea beetle when first set outdoors in spring.

Asters are subject to several diseases that persist in the soil or are hard to rotate planting sites each year.

Morning glories are good climbers. Occasionally, tortoise beetles chew holes in the leaves.

Portulaca, or rose moss, doesn't

have many enemies and is a fine low-growing annual for a sunny spot. Seeds often self-sow, although these volunteers eventually revert to single, less attractive flower forms.

Because snapdragon seeds are so small, it is best to buy the flowers as started plants or to start them from seed indoors. Their best growth and flowering occurs in cool weather, as hot weather often discourages flowering. They are subject to a few insect disease pests.

Sweet peas are cool-weather plants. They often decline rapidly when hot weather arrives.

Not in this poll, but likely to be included in other polls of this type, is impatiens. The flower is available in a number of colors and will provide color for a long period.

Earl Aronson is the garden writer for Associated Press. For a copy of his "AP Guide to House Plants," send \$1.50 to: House Plants, AP Newsfeatures, 50 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, NY 10020. Gardening questions must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.)

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