

Dreamland Scarlet Zinnia

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Location: Roadside Flower bed of Teaching Garden of Will Rogers Park, Claremore

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Zinnias have very exciting lifelong history before receiving a well-deserved recognition. The plants are scattered on dry grassland of Southwestern U.S., Mexico and Central and South America. Aztecs the Mexican Emperor in 1500's named them as Eye-sore plants. The original plants were weedy looking with dull purple blossoms. The plants were known as Mexican wild flower plants. Aztecs people have been growing them since 1520's.

A German Ambassador to Mexico gave an envelope of seeds to German botanist Johann Gottfried Zinn, who described the blossom in detail and published the first botanical illustration of the plant. After his death at age 32 of tuberculosis in 1759, this flower was named "Zinnia" in his memory by Carl Linnaeus, the "Father of Taxonomy." Zinnias have morphed from the "Mexican eye-sore flower" into respectability, now called the "Garden Cinderella." The Zinnia has also been recognized as the state flower of Indiana.

Zinnias ask very little, give generously to pollinators and prove to be a summer garden jewel. Zinnias are characterized as a symbol of endurance, lasting friendship, goodness and remembrance. In sizes from dwarf, compact and tall, Zinnias come in every color except blue and are perennial in frost-free areas. They need full sunlight and moist soil. Dead heading encourages more blooms. Double petaled scarlet flowers attract butterflies, humming birds and other pollinators. The flowers bloom from mid-summer to fall. The mature flower has both stamen and ovary.

Propagation: Stop dead heading at the end of the summer. Leave the brown flowers on the plant to allow the seeds to ripen. Collect the seed heads in a paper bag. Any moisture can ruin the seeds. Air-dry the seeds, place them in a paper envelope, label and date. Plant the seeds at 55 to 64-degree weather in early spring in fertile humus rich well drained soil in full sun. Zinnias are fast growing plants. Plants from seeds can be started indoors in peat pots or poo pots (cow dung pot) 4 to 6 weeks before the last expected frost date. Planting in succession will help for longer flower display.