

Features

1/1/2025

Rediscovering Marigolds

Jennifer Polanz



American gardeners have long used marigolds as a staple in the garden (its history in the U.S. dates back to the Revolutionary War-era and to the Aztecs originally). And just as the Aztecs prized it for “magical” properties, we enjoy them not only for blooms and fragrance, but for deer-resistance, organic pest control qualities and as an attractant to pollinators. There’s lots to love, but up to now it’s been mainly a spring potted plant. That may be changing, however.

Pictured: The blooms of Endurance Sunset, Orange and Yellow on the table from Syngenta Flowers.

Celebrating the Season

There’s growing (ha!) interest in marigolds for the fall time frame in multiple ways. Potted plants can be incorporated into mixed containers, as the colors fit right in with the seasonal hues of oranges, reds, golds and whites. Both the African and French marigolds can stand a little chill in the air, down to about 50F degrees. And as Jennifer Barnes, retail accounts manager at Syngenta Flowers, told me when we talked for this story, consumers are becoming more excited about decorating for the fall, so incorporating marigolds into temporary mixed containers provides another option.

The African marigolds, especially, in pot form have lots of applications in the fall for the Día de los Muertos celebration to honor those who have passed. “Marigold sales have increased over the past few years,” Jennifer noted. “Marigolds align themselves really well for fall production and the colors obviously go along with what we think about for fall. So there are two different places to consider—certainly added into mix containers and sold that way for the fall, but also for Day of the Dead programs.”

The yellow and orange blooms are popular in the African marigold style, as it offers the larger pom bloom. Syngenta Flowers has multiple options on the potted side depending on what retailers need. Antigua is an African marigold in Orange, Gold, Yellow, Primrose or a Mix, and grows to 10- to 12-in. tall, while Perfection is another African marigold in Orange and Yellow that grows up to 16-in. tall.

A third option from Syngenta Flowers is Inca II, another African marigold that comes in Gold, Yellow, Primrose, Deep Orange and a Mix, and has a height in between Antigua and Perfection at 12-in. to 14-in. And one more is

Endurance, a compact double African/French cross that comes in Orange, Yellow and Sunset.

What's also great about the marigolds is quick production time. Though it's a little longer than early spring, it's still pretty fast at around 12 weeks from seed to finish, Jennifer said. (She added anyone interested can visit SyngentaFlowers.com to see the growing guides for marigolds.)



French marigolds also can be a great option in the fall and Joan Mazat at Ball Seed recommended a few that work well in potted arrangements. While Joan is now the cut flower business manager for Ball Seed, she's also a part of the talented team that puts together the stunning containers at Ball Seed Customer Days.

Pictured: Antigua Mix from Syngenta Flowers.

"For potted arrangements, I personally use the Bonanza or the Durango series of French marigold, depending on the color and form preferred," she said. "Each of those series comes in all of the key marigold colors and they grow uniformly on strong stems for attractive pots."

Use them as quick, impulse seasonal decor."

She added, too, they're easy to sow and grow, making them a great option for retailers to have on hand at most times of the year.

"The marigold I planted in my yard bloomed until Thanksgiving for me, so their beauty lasts with the gardener well past the end of October," she said as a Chicagoland-area resident.

Don't Forget the Cuts

Cut African marigolds are also an important part of the Día de los Muertos celebration (November 1-2), as well as for Diwali, a Hindu celebration that takes place in either October or November each year (this year the main celebration is October 20). Both use cut marigolds to decorate with and Joan recommended a couple of options for holiday-themed cuts. One is Xochi from PanAmerican Seed, which can be sown-and-grown easily during the summer for bouquets or long-stem bunches in the fall. The stem length is 24-in. and Xochi features strong stems with a rich, orange color.

Another option is Coco from Sakata in Deep Orange, Gold and Yellow. These stems are upwards of 36-in. tall and the petals are edible, adding flavor to salads, desserts or cocktails with a citrus-spice bitterness.

(More information about Joan's recommendations can be found at ballseed.com.)

Retail-Ready

I asked our *buZZ!* retail e-newsletter editor Ellen Wells to put out a request for me last fall for anyone who might be offering marigolds during this time of year and Darrel Wood, general manager at Seguin Gardens & Gifts in Cicero, Illinois, graciously responded back. While they don't do any events, they do create a Día de los Muertos ofrenda (an altar) and make sure to have marigolds for sale and included in the display.

He said they have customers asking for marigolds during the fall and the orange mix is the most popular. But it's often a struggle to get what he needs because growers haven't always stocked them. "I've pretty much just gotten whatever variety I can get my hands on," he said. "Most nurseries we buy from don't have any this time of year."

If you're starting to see more demand for these cut and potted flowers in the fall in your region, it's worth reaching

out to your growers to see if there's interest in providing options for this fall. **GP**