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Best New Annuals for 2010: The All-America Selection Flowers Are Ready!

By **Gordon James**

Everyone wants their best ever flower garden every year. This year, economy or no, is no exception. Here is a hint: plant the annual flowers selected as All America Selections for 2010, and you might just get the flower garden you are looking for---and under budget!

What are the Best Annuals for 2010?

Every year a few of the annual flowers introduced stand out from the rest. These superior flowers have earned the All America Selection award. To even be considered for AAS selection, a plant or flower must show at least two significantly improved qualities when grown in supervised trial gardens and be superior to all similar flowers on the market. To sort out which flowers win, they are grown for a full year in 24 US states and 5 Canadian provinces under the watchful eye of official AAS judge, a horticultural professional. As you can see, they really are the best for the year.

Two of my favorite All America Selections this year, for gardens here in North Texas, are a pair of Zinnias. They are AAS® Winner 'Double Zahara Fire' and 'Zahara Starlight Rose'. Each has won the AAS Bedding Plant Award for 2010. 'Zahara Starlight Rose' is the first rose and white bi-color zinnia, while Double Zahara Fire combines excellent disease resistance with brilliant scarlet color. To compare them to something now on the market, look at 'Profusion White,' or 'Profusion Cherry' Zinnias.

Easy For Gardeners To Begin Growing

There are several reasons to like these beauties other than their gorgeous blooms and their inherent ease of growing. First, these particular selections have a dependable resistance to leaf spot and mildew diseases. This ensures healthy plants which in turn ensures plenty of flowers and a long season. Second, if you are starting these flowers from seed yourself ---giving you the option of many more plants per dollar spent---germination takes only approximately 2 to 3 days. Third, the sprouting environment is simple: room temperatures, while keeping the potting soil constantly moist. What could be easier?

Excellent Growth Habits

Both of these plants grow up to be handsome, symmetrical, dark green plants, maturing at about 12 inches tall and wide. The blooms on these two, however, are as different as the foliage is uniform. Double Zahara Fire produces fully double blooms that are normally 2 ½ inches across in a fiery red-orange. Zahara Starlight Rose is a single-flowered rose and white bi-color. Both are early to bloom—in about 8 - 10 weeks from seed.

Where To Grow Them

Like all Zinnias, these winners need full-sun to flower properly. Because they are so heat tolerant, either or both these AAS Winners can be matched with other sun loving annuals in container plantings, as well in beds. Seed can be sown indoors or in greenhouse 6 to 10 weeks before transplanting into garden soil. Since all zinnias prefer warm soil and growing conditions, planting outdoors in cold soil may be detrimental to plant growth, and as we said before, provide maximum sunlight even while seedlings. In warmer southern locations, seed could even be sown directly into prepared garden soil or containers.

Either of these Zaharas are a perfect annual flower choice for either a beginner or experienced gardener. They are undemanding of care, yet giving a maximum number of blooms. This new zinnia was bred by PanAmerican Seed Co.

Sources:

The actual fact sheet is at <http://www.panamseed.com/media/Culture/PAS/ZinniaDoubleZahara.pdf>

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