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Taishan marigolds: Golden Olympic winner can star in your garden, too

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Taishan marigolds were stars at the Beijing Olympics in 2008, and this spring you will have the opportunity to put them to the test in your garden, too. This award-winning **marigold** series gets its name from **Taishan** Mountain, one of the five revered mountains in China.

These are large-flowered African marigolds that will be available in gold, orange and yellow. There is a mix available also, which is extremely showy. You'll find these to be rather compact, reaching 12 inches tall with a spread close to 10 inches. The sturdy branches easily support the large flowers, living up to the flower's name, which means "stability" in Chinese.

Select a site in full sun for best blooming performance. The soil should be fertile and well drained. Tight, heavy, compact clay will yield less than satisfying results. If you find yourself with this dilemma, you can incorporate three to four inches of organic matter as you work your soil.

If this seems like backbreaking work, you could plant on raised beds using a prepared landscape planting mix. You'll notice this to be a common practice around commercial shopping centers and office complexes. **Taishan** marigolds should be spaced about 10 inches apart. Be sure to add a good layer of mulch after planting to conserve moisture and deter weed growth.

The shorter stature of these marigolds makes them ideal for using at the front of the border. **Taishan** Orange partners in flaming contrast with blue flowers like Victoria Blue salvia. You also

can use them in large informal drifts where you might grow them adjacent to another drift of the new Shockwave Denim Blue petunia.

Taishan Yellow could do the same, although it will look even better with violet-colored partners. Try it at the front of the border with All Around Purple gomphrena in the back. You likewise could do an informal drift planted adjacent to a drift of Artist Purple ageratums.

For the long growing season, you'll want to keep your **Taishan** marigolds fed with light applications of a slow-release fertilizer about every four to six weeks. My favorite blend is a 12-6-6, but it really isn't that big of a deal. A little deadheading of old flowers will keep your plants looking picture perfect.

Taishan also is well suited for use in mixed containers. I had the opportunity to see and photograph a wonderfully designed container in which **Taishan** Orange was used as a filler plant combined with the new Trusty Rusty coleus as the thriller and Can-Can Strawberry calibrachoa as the spiller.

Marigolds tend to be taken-for-granted plants in today's garden, but they really offer a long season of bloom, making them among the best buys for your gardening dollar. They also can be planted at any time during the growing season. For a late season pick-me-up in August, you hardly could do better than the **marigold**.

This may seem like an endless winter, but spring is coming. When it does, be sure to put **Taishan** marigolds high on your list.