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Marigolds can be winners

NORMAN WINTER

McClatchy-Tribune Information Services

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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. 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. A mix is also available and is extremely showy. They are compact, reaching 12 inches with a spread close to 10 inches. The branches are sturdy and easily support the large flowers, and they live 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 back-breaking work, you also can 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. The 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. The 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.

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 favourite blend is a 12-6-6.

Marigolds tend to be take-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.

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



Courtesy Norman Winter / McClatchy-Tribune

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