

# THE OUTSIDER

Illinois Extension Horticulture serving Henry, Mercer, Rock Island, and Stark



## SPRING IS COMING! SPRING IS COMING

A quick flip through a seed catalog reveals a vast and varied assortment of plant options. Gone are the days of being limited to red tomatoes, orange carrots, yellow sunflowers and purple petunias. Plant breeding and selection programs have given us an endless (and sometimes overwhelming) array of plant options.

Life begins the day you  
start a garden.

— Chinese Proverb

## GARDEN ASSESSMENT

Before getting caught up in all the fun colors and options, take a few minutes to plan your garden and your joy will be compounded by harvesting fruits, vegetables, and flowers you enjoy. Take some time to answer these questions and let your responses guide your planting plan.

- What do my family and I like to eat?
- What plants hold sentimental value?
- What am I going to do with my produce?
- How much space do I have to grow?
- How much time do I have to invest in gardening tasks?
- What is my budget?
- What are the growing conditions in my garden?
- Am I looking for annuals or perennials?





## CULTIVAR FUN

After you have assessed your needs and wants, you can start shopping with confidence and a bit of adventure. Here are a few twists on some garden favorites you might consider.

### CARROT

An early season crop, carrots are available in a rainbow of colors beyond orange. Dragon and Purple Haze are cultivars that offer bright purple skin and an orange core for a fun surprise. Yellowbunch and Gold Nugget brighten up any plate with hues of golden yellow. Lunar White or White Satin lack pigment but not flavor.

To grow carrots, be sure to plant in stone-free, loose soil for optimum root growth. Seeds are very small so using a seed tape or pelleted seeds can help with spacing while planting. Sow seeds directly into the ground when soil temperatures are between 50 and 85 degrees F. Carrots will tolerate a light frost.



### RADISH

Similar to carrots, there is a rainbow of colors available for radish growers. Bravo is a sweet purple root. Watermelon type of radish boast a white exterior with a red core and brag about being sweeter than other types of radish. Rido Red Hybrid or Watermelon Winter are two cultivars to try for this delightful surprise. For the most wow factor, try growing a Black Spanish radish. This heirloom variety has been grown in Europe for centuries and will be sure to stir up conversation once harvested.



Radish are cool season crops that can be planted mid-spring in well-drained, fine textured soil. Radish grow quickly and should be harvested as soon as roots are developed for best flavor and texture. This cool season crop does not tolerate hot, dry weather so plant for spring or late fall harvest.





## BEANS

Bush beans are a wonderful warm season crop to have in the garden rotation. They are a legume which means a mutually beneficial relationship with a soil bacterial allows the roots to contribute nitrogen to the soil, helping to restore soil health. Furthermore, a trifecta of colors makes these garden staples so much fun. Purple and yellow pod colors are available in addition to the ever popular green. Cultivars such as Goldilocks, Bamako, Amethyst, and Velour will delight the harvester, but chef beware- purple pods turn green as they are cooked.

Plant beans after the last late frost date into well drained soil. Optimal seed germination occurs when soil temperatures are above 70 degrees F. Beans are short lived plants so plant a succession planting for an endless harvest. Succession planting should be done approximately two to three weeks apart through midsummer.

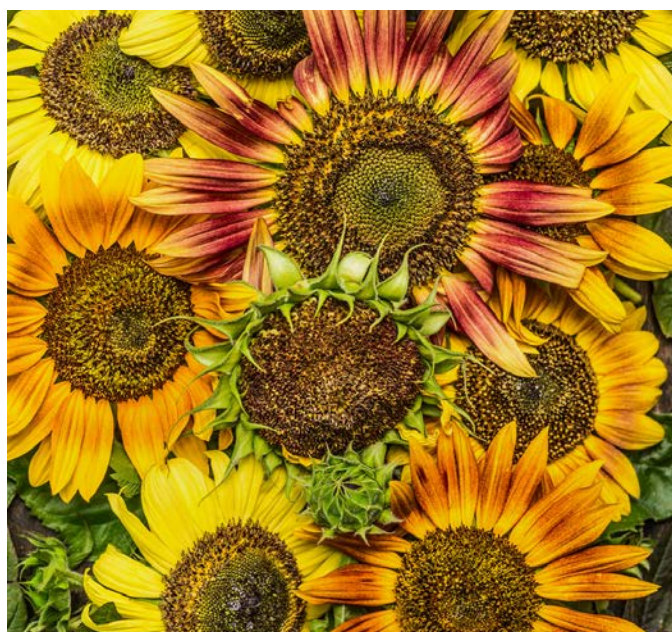


Gardening adds years to your life  
and life to your years.

— Unknown

## SUNFLOWER

Gone are the days when sunflower varieties were limited to big and yellow or yellow and big. Breeders have developed a variety of series that offer dozens of options. Some are multi-stem while others are single stem, some reach heights upward of six and a half feet while others are a more compact four feet. And the colors, oh the colors. Yellow still reigns supreme but no two yellows are made the same.



Some are soft and pale while others are bright golden. Variability can be found in bicolor blossoms and a few offer shades of pink and burgundy. More subtle but significant differences can be observed when comparing pollen bearing blooms to pollen free cultivars as cut flowers, pollen free flower heads make much less mess when displayed indoors.

Sunflowers do best when direct seeded into the ground and do not tolerate transplant well. Seeds germinate best in warm soils as temperatures reach 70 to 75 degrees. Succession planting every two weeks will extend your harvest (and enjoyment) of sunny blossoms.



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## ZINNIA

A long-time garden favorite, zinnias have always offered growers a wide variety of bright colors but breeders have developed cultivars that are diverse in flower size and form in addition to pastel and multicolored blooms. Some cultivars develop flower heads as large as six inches in diameter while others produce miniature blossoms of one to two inches. The number of petals produces can drastically change the look of the flower. Single, semi-double, and double blossoms will continue to delight all summer and benefit from harvesting or deadheading. The more you harvest, the more the plant produces.



Zinnias are native to grass lands and arid regions resulting in plants that are tolerant of dry conditions in the garden. Zinnias are easy to start from seed either indoors or direct seeded. Seeds can also be easily harvested and saved for the following year. However, if you want to save seed, understand that zinnia are open pollinated so the genetics of next year's plants will not produce the same characteristics of your hybrid seeds, they will begin to revert to the traditional colors and form.



## OUTSIDER ACTION

Try these activities to be more of an Outsider

- Visit the IL Extension Master Gardeners demonstration garden at the [QCCA Flower and Garden Show March 24-27, 2022.](#)
- Order an unusual cultivar of your favorite garden plant, have fun growing.

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