

Horticulture Hints

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Club

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Presented by Kathy Lingusky

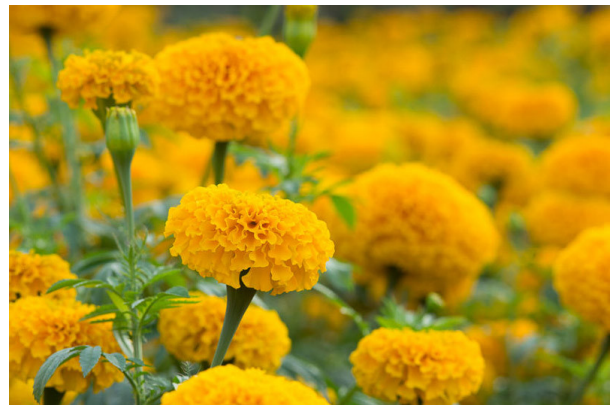
How did we get to November already? Where did this year go?! Sorry....On this beautifully cool day in November, gardening to me becomes a little less hands-on, and a little more philosophical. Although getting out there and getting your hands dirty is certainly more comfortable than it has been in past months.

November is actually a very lovely month to get out there and garden. You don't have to mow the lawn, and you really don't have to (shouldn't!) fertilize. Cool season vegetables are almost no-care. By the way, there is still time to plant them: kale, broccoli, cauliflower, etc. They'll survive the upcoming freezes just fine, unless they're tiny, tiny seedlings. Even then, they may survive. Most of the brassicas actually become a little sweeter with a freeze. Even some flowers will survive the freezes: snapdragons, calendula, petunias, pansies will all survive a light freeze. Marigolds will do ok in a light freeze as well.

Speaking of marigolds, these bright faces of summer in the rest of the country will bloom nearly year-round here. Let me tell you a little about these interesting flowers. There are three different types of marigolds in the *Tagetes* family: French (*Tagetes patula*), African (*Tagetes erecta*), and Mexican tarragon (*Tagetes lucida*). All three are native to Mexico and Central America. Why are they called French and African (more on the Mexican tarragon later)?

This is where things get interesting. First of all, somehow, seeds of the 'African' type made their way to the west coast of Africa. By the time the British landed on African soil in the 16th century, they had naturalized in much of the northern part of the continent,

so the British then erroneously called them 'African'. The name stuck. These beautiful and useful flowers grow on an erect stem (*erecta*) up to three feet tall. As with most marigolds, colors range from pale yellow to orange, and contain powerful scented oils that can be useful in keeping certain pests out of the garden. You will seldom find these



Tagetes erecta (African)

in stores or nurseries. Probably the only way to grow them is to find seeds (I'll put links in the email to which this newsletter is attached).

Now for the 'French': they are called such because of their wide use in French gardens. But they originate from Mexico and Central America. These are small (six to eight inches), compact and bushy plants that, today, have a wide range of colors, and are widely grown by nurseries in this country. Different and interesting varieties are available from many seed companies. As with the African varieties, they are very useful in gardens, not only for their beauty and



Tagetes patula (French)

pollinator interest, but the strong scent keeps some garden pests at bay. And in India, this flower has become associated with weddings and celebrations. The bright colors are very important to happy occasions. Back in Mexico, marigolds have been associated with Day of the Dead celebrations, where the strong scents are thought to be able to lure the spirits of the dead back to the land of the living.

Before I get to the flower I consider the *most* interesting, the name 'marigold' came from Spain, where poorer people, who couldn't afford to lay gold at the feet of statues of the Virgin Mary, laid these beautiful flowers at

her feet. The flowers became known as 'Mary's gold', hence 'marigold'. Interesting? I thought so.

What about Mexican tarragon? Glad you asked. Mexican tarragon (also called Santa Maria, Yerba Anis, Mexican Marigold, Sweet Mace, and Pericon) is the only one of these that is a perennial. Growing as a woody shrub with an extensive root system, it bears daisy-like, yellow flowers with a yellow center, two and a half to three feet tall. They grow best in zones 9-11, and are often used



Tagetes lucida (Mexican tarragon)

in cooking in place of French tarragon, which doesn't do well here at all. The shrub grows fairly quickly, and can be drought tolerant, but flowers better if kept moist. As with all marigolds, full sun is always best.

Have a great November, and happy gardening!