

# Zinnia

Botanical Name: Zinnia, Family Asteraceae



Mexico is the native home of the zinnia and was called *mal de ojos* by the Spaniards because they thought the small flowers ugly to the eye. Professor Casimir Gomez de Ortego sent examples of the plant to his friend, the marchioness of Bute in Madrid who was the wife of the English Ambassador to Spain and daughter-in-law to John Bute, the director of the royal Botanic Gardens at Kew. After receiving the specimens, the marchioness sent them to John Bute.

How did the zinnia get its name? In 1750's a medical professor, Johann Gottfried Zinn, studied many things. Two of his studies include the eye and descriptions of the flora found around Gottingen. He published a book in 1753 on the eye and was the first to describe the iris of the eye in detail. His description was so accurate that it has been proven accurate with today's technology. He died in 1759 from a "most consumptive disease," and is remembered by a part of the eye called "Zinn's zonule" as well as our garden flower.

Who then named the zinnia? Linnaeus named the zinnia for Zinn and his discoveries of the eye. Perhaps Linnaeus thought the zinnia looked like an eye?

The zinnia went unnoticed until the Burpee Company, here in America, planted an entire field of experimental zinnias. One of the zinnias stood out and was located on row 66. From this one flower, "Old 66", most of the hybrids we know, have been developed.

Kew Garden's Bute died an appropriate botanist's death. He was reaching for a rare plant, fell off a cliff and never recovered from his injuries.

Bute, Zinn and Linnaeus would be pleased to know of the popularity of today's zinnia. The flower stands for "thoughts of friends." Zinnia's brighten our gardens and floral arrangements, and do look like large eyes if one has an imagination.



100 Flowers and How They Got Their Names  
by Diana Wells

Pictures from: *the real dirt: A Gardening Handbook for Parker County*