



## FOR KIDS — GROWING NASTURTIUMS

by Julia Hancock

### HOW TO BUY

Nasturtiums are colourful annual plants that can be purchased either as seed which takes approximately two weeks to germinate, or seedlings which flower a couple of months after planting. They come in shades that are guaranteed to brighten up a late winter/early spring day – creamy-butter, burnt orange, tangerine, egg-yolk yellow, blood red, cherry, maroon and scarlet. The flowers are large and open with soft velvety petals and often with a characteristic spur behind. There are hybrids with variegated foliage, dwarf varieties, trailing types and those that produce semi-double or double blooms. The leaves are round like a waterlily and both leaf and flower are edible, adding a deliciously peppery bite to salads.



*Nasturtiums come in hybrid varieties with variegated foliage.*

### WHERE TO PLANT

Nasturtiums flower best in a sunny position, but are also obliging in semi-shade particularly once the weather begins to warm up in spring. Unlike other annual flowers, they bloom better in poor, dry soil and if overfed and watered will produce excessive foliage and no flowers. However, if your soil is really rubbly, a skimpy dressing of superphosphate will help them settle in and establish. The dwarf varieties make excellent container specimens, while the trailing types look attractive in hanging baskets.



### HOW TO MAINTAIN

Nasturtiums should be left to look after themselves. If they start to become lanky before they've finished flowering the longest stems can be trimmed back to bushier growth which will extend their life for a few more weeks. Once the blooms cease and the foliage begins to turn yellow it is time to take them out. By this stage non-dwarfing varieties which have grown in the ground will be several metres in diameter, resulting in armfuls of vegetation which can go straight onto the compost heap. Give it a good shake first to dislodge the nutty seeds, which will germinate profusely the following year where they fall.



## PESTS AND DISEASES

There is an ongoing debate about whether nasturtiums make good companions to the cabbage family; some swear they do, while others assert that their billowing growth provides the perfect hiding place for the cabbage white butterfly to lay her eggs.

There is no doubt that as the weather warms up, nasturtiums become a breeding site for aphids, but this in itself is not a bad thing as they are approaching the end of their lives anyway, and they may even act as a decoy to protect more precious new growth on plants such as rose and citrus from aphid infestation.

Leaves which appear to have a meandering tunnel running through their layers indicate that the plant is acting as a host to the larvae of one of the many leafminer insects. As they hatch into undesirable adults such as sawflies, wasps and flies, it is advisable to pick off the affected leaves and destroy them.

Bonus point: Apart from being edible, nasturtiums also make good cut flowers and will last in a vase for up to a week.

## NASTURTIUMS FOR KIDS

Nasturtium seeds make a great gift for children because these plants are hardy, growing well in even the poorest of garden soil. It can be the ideal first plant for young children (aged 3 and up). Children will love their bright, multi-coloured blooms and their edible (non-toxic) nature will keep Mum and Dad's minds at ease. They have large seeds which can be easily handled by small fingers, and their fast germination time (seedlings emerge about two weeks after planting) are other features that ensure they won't disappoint the young gardener.

Here's what to do:

- Dig up an area of garden bed or fill pots or trays with ordinary garden soil (fairly poor soil is ideal).
- Cover soil with Searles Seed Raising Mix 2.5cm deep.
- Let the child poke holes in the soil 20-30cm apart and 2.5cm deep with their fingers (depending on the age of the child, the holes should come up to around the second knuckle on the child's index finger).
- Have the child drop one nasturtium seed in each hole and then cover and pat the soil down gently. (Nasturtium seeds need darkness in order to germinate.)
- Keep the beds well

watered until the seedlings have four leaves or more. Neglecting them from this stage onwards will keep them nice and compact. Definitely stop feeding and watering once the plants get to flowering stage (after about 10 weeks).

Most children will be fascinated by the different stages of development of the plants. Towards the end of its season, go 'seed collecting' with the child so they can keep some seeds to be planted again next year.

