

Should marigold be the national flower?

The legal eagle may soon carry a marigold in its beak, at least if the highly vocal marigold fanciers have their way.

There is indeed a marigold lobby, deeply committed to the installation of America's favorite flower as the national floral emblem.

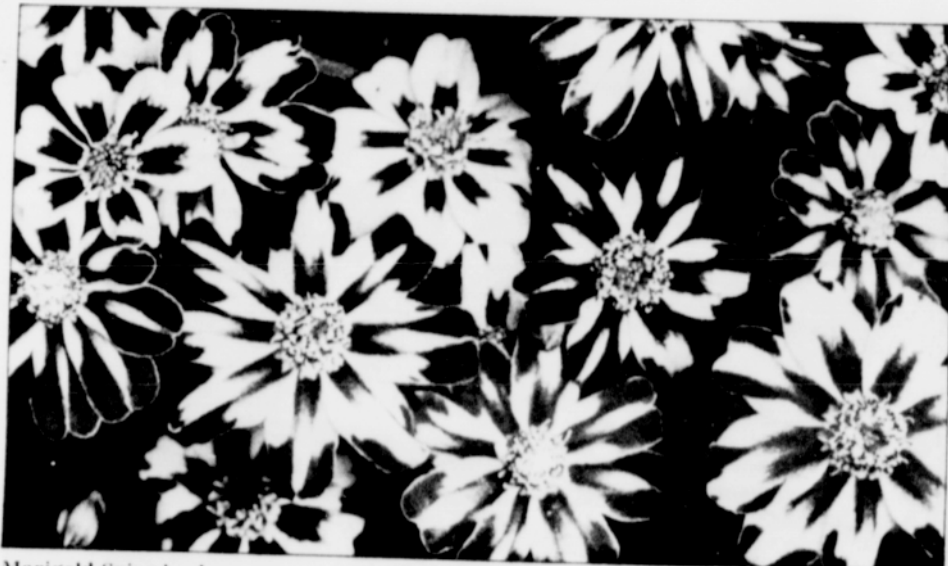
Marigolds outrank any other flower in numbers of seeds and transplants purchased for our gardens. They are easy to start, easy to care for and never cease to bloom. There are tall marigolds for bouquets as well as short marigolds for border plantings. Medium-sized marigolds fill in the gap.

There are marigolds ideal for garden containers and some which can be stunning hanging baskets. There are single-flowered marigolds, orange marigolds and bicolored bloomers. The most popular are the gold and yellow varieties.

Marigolds are big business for seedsmen, and many dollars of research have gone into producing exciting new varieties to temp the horticultural palette of marigold enthusiasts. As a result, the marigold gets better every year.

Yellow and bicolors are now contending for first place in marigold sales. Tiny 8- to 10-inch varieties have been updated to produce larger blooms, with the same tiny habit.

Large 3-inch blooms can be found in varieties scarcely over a foot in height. The semi-dwarf marigold of this



Marigold Spinwheel

group now has earlier bloom, and very compacted petals for a bouquet of exciting yellow color. 'Sunshot,' available for 1981 as a started plant, far outperforms its predecessors.

Bicolor single marigolds are particularly attractive in containers. The most outstanding bicolors offer two-toned intense contrasts of red and yellow or red and gold on each petal. 'Spinwheel,' new for 1981 from started plants, vividly contrasts bright red with clear yellow stripes.

Marigold breeder achievements have not been overlooked by awards. In the past three years new marigolds 'Queen Bee,' 'Queen Sophia' and 'Janie' have picked up medals from America and Europe. Merits which prompted recognition

for these beauties include early flowering, resistance to heat stress and uniqueness of form and color.

If the range of marigolds is not dizzying enough in its continuous change and variation, there are even selections of unique color and shape within the popular double category. Crested marigolds have two distinct types of petals. Center petals of crested types, such as the 1981 introduction, 'Glowing Embers,' are tightly compacted. They form the raised crown of this bicolor, which is then surrounded by flattened guard petals with identical color conformation.

True marigold fanciers find a myriad of uses for these garden stalwarts. The debate still rages about the use of marigolds to repel garden insects. While that

issue is a question, there is no mistaking the fact that insects do not seem to be attracted to the flowers and leaves of members of the marigold family. Fewer diseases likewise trouble a marigold.

There are recipes for additions of marigolds to salads. The summer soup becomes a gourmet's creation with a few marigold petals thrown in at the last minute. Try a few petals in a rice recipe for saffron-colored economy. The ultimate visual champagne punch sports marigold petals on the top.

Genetic attention to this durable flower has yet to



Marigold Sunshot

give us a sweetly-scented variety. Over the years the pungent aroma of marigolds has been reduced to a pleasant minimum. While scentless marigolds satisfy many, other gardeners enjoy the strong aroma of certain species.

If we do not yet have the emblematic marigold on every coin and dollar, we at least come close to having the marigold in every kitchen pot. Small amounts of petals, added to chicken feed, give bright yellow color to the yolk, a harmless, organic and highly attractive feature for the egg.

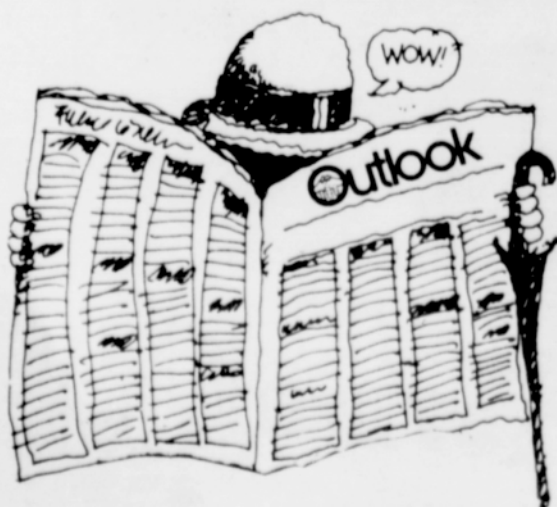
The pear shaped, peach

soft tones of the late Senator Everett Dirksen still echo the halls of Congress through the activities of the Marigold Society who yearly mount a campaign for legislative enactment proclaiming the marigold our national bloom.

Like most of us, the marigold is an emigrant, transported to seedsmen around the world from its native Mexico and South America. Like our pioneer ancestors, the marigold now thrives across the nation. With true New World stamina, it persists and blooms where it is planted, wherever that may be.



Marigold Sunshot with border of Ageratum Blue Puffs.



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