

Is it me, or do you also feel the majority of flowers blooming at this time of year are either yellow, orange, gold or combinations thereof? Of late, my attention has been drawn to these three colors. For the past month, while driving to and from work, I've noticed these colors along the roads, ditches and in the fields. Masses of flowers in assorted shades of yellow including goldenrod, common sunflower, and sneezeweed are beautifully blooming. Even the fields of corn, milo and soybeans are changing to yellow-gold.

A similar coloration change is occurring in our yard. Although that, too, might be attributed to the change in seasons, another reason is more deliberate. Both Rita and I enjoy growing these colors in our landscape. Perhaps we do so, knowing these colors invoke certain feelings or moods. The color yellow is supposed to make people feel joyful and smile; while the color orange is bold, conveying feelings of excitement, enthusiasm and a passion for life. That's how they make us feel.

Whether it is spring, summer or fall, these colors can be readily viewed in our yard. Presently, they can be seen in our asclepias (butterfly plants), zinnias, gazanias, marigolds, gloriosa daisies, begonias, rudbeckias and one of my favorites, tithonia.

For nearly ten years Rita and I have been growing *Tithonia rotundifolia* in our yard. More commonly called Mexican sunflower, this flower is known for its vivid orange color. It comes from Mexico and Central America. It grows best in warm tropical climates that are *hot and dry*. What a perfect plant to grow in Nebraska — especially this year. Wouldn't you agree? Although hardy as a perennial in Zones 8 to 11, in Nebraska, tithonia is grown as an annual. In Greek mythology, Tithonia is named after the dawn goddess Eos's mythical boyfriend Tithonis.



To grow tithonia in Nebraska, one must start it from seed indoors in the early spring or buy seedlings from the nursery. Tithonia should not be planted outdoors until the threat of frost is past. A few varieties include *Torch*, *Gold Finger*, and *Fiesta del Sol*. The real reward from growing tithonia comes at this time of year when many other flowers have come and gone. This plant shines in the heat of summer. In years past, I've planted the variety *Fiesta-Del-Sol*, a smaller version; but this year, I chose to plant the variety *Torch*. What a descriptive name. Its fiery-hot, bright orange color intensifies the hottest summer days. *Torch* is a quick-growing annual and blooms from mid-summer until frost. Dead-heading is a must to extend bloom.

Torch's leaves are rough and hairy, dark green, and lobed. The plant reaches up to six feet tall and spreads nearly two feet wide.

Tithonia flowers are exceptionally attractive to butterflies. Their daisy-like, three-to-four inch flowers perched atop long stems also make them a desirable cut flower.

Cultural care for tithonia includes planting in well-drained, moderately fertile soil and in full sun. Tithonia thrives in summer heat and humidity; however, drought can wilt it. In extremely hot and dry weather, tithonia benefits from a deep, supplemental watering. Staking may be required to protect it from strong winds due to its towering height. Tithonia has very few pests, and although an occasional slug or snail will feed on its leaves, deer find it too scratchy and hairy to eat.

As summer advances and autumn approaches, I urge you to notice the color change. Perhaps you, too, will start seeing more yellows, golds and oranges. Furthermore, if you desire to fill your life with passion and enthusiasm, next year consider planting *Tithonia rotundifolia* 'Torch'. Its fiery bright orange color will surely set your heart aglow.