

BORDER CROSSINGS

ORIGINS

BOTANY BAY LEARNING RESOURCES

Marigolds



Marigolds originated from Mexico and Central America

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:African_Marigold_\(405632987\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:African_Marigold_(405632987).jpg)

What do Indigenous people call this plant?

In the indigenous language Nahuatl, Marigolds are called "cemooalxochiyl" which means "the flower of twenty petals". The more modern spelling of "cempasúchil" is now used. Today it is widely known as the African Marigold, American Marigold, or Aztec Marigold and is grown all over the world.

When was this plant first documented?

Marigolds were first documented by Bernardino de Sahagún in the Florentine Codex. This was written in the 1570s by Bernardino de Sahagún with the help of a group of Nahuatl people in which he recorded the plants, animals and customs of the Nahuatl people. Bernardino de Sahagún learned the Nahuatl language and wrote the manuscript in the language and in Spanish.

How many varieties of this plant are known?

There are now around 56 species of marigolds found around the world

Where and how was the plant originally grown and used?

The Aztecs consider the Marigold to be a sacred flower and selectively bred them to create larger and more beautiful flowers.

How do Indigenous people relate to this plant?

The Aztecs used the flowers both for decorative and medicinal purposes. The flowers are edible and used to cure hiccups and treat people that have been struck by lightning. According to The Florentine Codex, Marigolds were used in both celebrations and medicine. They were used in the celebrations of two Aztec feast days that commemorated the dead.

When and how did this plant first come to Britain?

Spanish explorers brought Marigold seeds from the Aztecs and brought them to Europe. They were grown in Spain, France and later North Africa (which is why they are commonly known as African and French Marigolds) despite originating in what we now call Mexico.

Special properties

Marigold flowers can be used as a skin wash, a dye and for food colouring. They are used to treat minor skin irritations like rashes, sunburn, bruises and eczema. They have also been used to treat upset stomachs and for toothache.

Fun facts

Marigolds are featured in an Aztec myth about a young couple, Xóchtitl and Huitzilin, who would climb a mountain and leave offerings of flowers to the sun god Tonatiuh. When Huitzilin was killed in battle, Xóchtitl asks the sun god to reunite them. Tonatiuh, taking pity on her, sent down a ray of sunshine that turned Xóchtitl into a Marigold and brought Huitzilin back to life as a hummingbird.

Marigolds are also associated with the Goddess Mictecacihuatl who rules the underworld and guards the bones of the dead. She is also known as 'The Lady of the Dead' and her grinning skull face and marigold flowers are now linked to The Day of the Dead (Día de los Muertos) celebrations. The bright flowers of the marigold used to celebrate the life of people that have died rather than being sad about their death.

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BOTANY BAY is a participation and learning project by Border Crossings' ORIGINS Festival, made possible with The National Lottery Heritage Fund. Thanks to National Lottery players, we have been able to engage five schools across the country with the Indigenous heritage of plants, gardens and food.



Border Crossings Registered Charity No. 1048836

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