Cosmos
A WaterWise Annual

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Cosmos seems to grow readily in most gardens in our area. I found myself wondering the other day where it comes from—any guesses before you read further? It certainly is a popular annual in our Willamette Valley climate. It grows well, self-seeds in favorable environments, and seems to be right at home, even with minimal irrigation. One reason is that Cosmos is successful and drought tolerant or WaterWise is that it is native to nearby Mexico. Despite its southern origin, it grows as an annual in nearly all USDA zones within the US. Many cultivars have been developed and are available, in addition to the ones closer to the wild species.

Several Cosmos species are in the plant trade; the genus is a member of the sunflower family (Asteraceae). Cosmos sulphureus is yellow or orange. The more familiar Cosmos bipinnatus is pink, lavender, maroon, or white. Both species can grow up to 6 ft in a garden setting! Plant young plants or seeds in sunny locations where taller plants are welcome. Provide some irrigation (preferably by a drip system or another way to avoid overhead irrigation) during long dry periods, and water thoroughly and deeply. Shallow watering encourages shallower roots which will make your plants less drought hardy. In windy or open areas, the plants may need staking, but you can do without this in mixed beds because the other plants will help hold them up. Cosmos make good cut flowers as well. So enjoy this perky annual plant and save water at the same time.

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