

*Beautiful dresses, lovely flowers, little girls  
—it's time for a Summer . . .*



## **Tea Party!**

*By Kristi McCabe*



Zinnias are, without a doubt, the flowers of paradise. With their spiky, eccentric faces composed of every color of the rainbow, endless varieties, and uncanny ability to attract every butterfly

within a 100-mile radius, zinnias must be the flowers of the angels.

Zinnias have a “wow” factor that cannot be denied: they are daring, striking, and eye-catching. They are also the most low-maintenance annuals in existence, the middle child of the flower family: self-sufficient, sometimes forgotten and left to fend for herself, while the elegant older sister—the rose—is pampered due to her time-consuming nature, and the baby of the family—the daffodil—receives lavish attention during her short, thrilling appearance in early Spring.

As you can tell, I love zinnias. I plant lots of them. I was tempted to call one of our children Zinnia.

One Summer day while I was waiting for my zinnias to bloom, I ended up in my favorite children’s consignment shop, where my eye immediately spotted the most enticing array of tiny ball gowns and summer dresses I had ever seen.

“Those are some beautiful dresses,” I said to the store manager.

“They just came in today,” she replied.

“Do you think they were worn once as flower girl dresses and then recycled? Oh, I’ve got to have those.”

Soon I was at home trying them on my pretty little girls. It seemed ridiculously impractical to buy those gorgeous dresses, once I realized there would be no occasion for wearing them at any time in the near future. My secondhand finds were relegated to the closet and soon lost hope of ever being worn.

Then, a month later, I was outside inspecting my flower beds, admiring the gently swaying zinnias that had grown to their full height, and I realized it was a scene that just begged to be photographed. But for what occasion?

*A backyard tea party.* My little girls could wear those beautiful gowns and invite their friends, and we would host a good, old-fashioned tea party.

Invitations were sent, RSVPs were received, the menu was planned—and party day arrived. My girls were all decked out in their new gowns. “I need a crown,” my three-year-old announced.

---



---

*“Mommy,” my three-year-old princess said, “I want to have a tea party again next Summer.”*

She would wear the gold tulle dress, but only with a crown. We obliged her, of course, because all I could think about was how beautiful she would look standing in front of my zinnia bed.

The tables were adorned with floral tablecloths, dainty china plates and fairy napkins, and—of course—Mason jars filled with fresh-cut zinnias. On the buffet table sat an array of finger sandwiches, rosemary sprigs, and blueberries frozen in ice cubes.

When photo time came, they all posed in front of the zinnias—in their tutus and taffeta, their khaki shorts and polo shirts. First came my youngest son, who was eager to sit between a pair of decked-out sisters.

“Will, give her a kiss!” someone called out to him.

My little redheaded Romeo leaned over and pecked one beautiful twin on the cheek, then the other. One girl scowled, the other erupted in giggles, and all the partygoers were delighted.

The afternoon was a flurry of activity, from little boys playing in the sandbox to little girls flying down the playground slide with no concern of ruining their Summer finery. The toddlers tried to master their bubble wands and stuffed their little faces with ivory cupcakes adorned with silver sprinkles. The adults enjoyed daiquiris and idle conversation, while older kids played backyard games and chased the little ones.

The party soon came to an end. As we cleaned up ivory napkins strewn across the lawn, collected crumbs from the cucumber-strawberry sandwiches, and poured out nearly full cups of tea (children are *not* fans of a good cup of English Breakfast), I took one last look at the zinnias, still standing where they had been all day, ready to get back to their quiet existence in the realm of breezy days and butterfly gatherings. Of course, my zinnias would die soon, when the season changed, but they will always come back, as long as I plant the seeds.

“Mommy,” my three-year-old princess began as she shed her crown and dress for the evening, “I want to have a tea party again next Summer. I like this dress. That’s *my* crown and nobody else can wear it.”

And that, fellow gardeners, is precisely what I imagine a zinnia could say if it could talk. ❖