



Cutting Gardens

By Kit Smith

UCCE El Dorado County Master Gardener

Cutting gardens can have perennials and annuals – and they can be both a beautiful addition to your yard, as well as a way to save money by making your own floral arrangements. Plant flowers that will be cut for inside enjoyment in well drained soil amended with compost, and keep in mind most like full sun. Group plants by sun and water needs and plan your garden according to height of the flower stems. Water to moisten the top two inches of soil. Use a slow release balanced fertilizer that is not high in nitrogen, and do not fertilize in the heat.

Cut flowers in the early morning with very sharp loppers, clippers, pruning shears or garden scissors. A dull blade will tear or crush delicate stems. Immediately place the cut stems in 100-110 degree water to cover much of the stem. Keep cut flowers in the water for two hours and in a cool environment. At the end of the two hours, remove any leaves that will be below the water line in the vase, re-cut the flower stems for the size of the vase and at an angle, and then put the flowers in vase of fresh lukewarm, tepid water.

Prune perennials at the end of the growing season to encourage lots of new stems. Regularly cutting the blooms and deadheading will keep plants flowering longer.

Flowers that reseed include: Lisianthus (*Eustoma grandiflorum*), Nasturtium (*Tropaeolum*), Cleome (*C. hasslerana*), Gaillardia (*Asteraceae*), Cosmos (*Asteraceae*), Corncockle (*Argostemma githago*), Larkspur (*Consolida ambigua*) – those that prefer partial shade are Godetia (*Clarkia amoena*), California poppy (*Papaver*), and Alyssum (*Brassicaceae*). Cleome (*C. spinosa*) or Spider Flower has large rounded heads of pink or white flowers with long protruding stamens, and has a long flowering season. Cosmos (*Asteraceae*) are daisy-like flowers that bloom three to four inches and have tufted yellow centers - they are proliferate bloomers and have a long season. For an extended vase life of cosmos, snip out the yellow center floret preferably while it is still closed. Love-in-a-Mist (*Nigella damascena*) has one inch-wide flowers. Re-sow the nigella seed in the fall for a second crop.

Consider these other annuals for the cutting garden. Zinnia (Asteraceae) has three to five-inch dahlia-like blooms. Be sure to plant zinnia where there is ample air circulation to prevent powdery mildew. Other showy flowers to grow for your home are: Bells of Ireland (Moluccella), Snapdragon (Antirrhinum), Statice (Limonium), Iceland poppy (Papaver nudicaule), Stock (Matthiola) and Sweet pea (Lathyrus). Love-lies-Bleeding (Amaranthus caudatus) has long eighteen-inch pendulous ropes of red flower clusters. Strawflower (Helichrysum) has two and one-half inch wide papery flowers. Cut strawflowers before they are fully open, or the centers will turn brown.

Perennials that can be in the flower garden are Black-eyed Susan (Rudbeckia), Purple coneflower (Echinacea purpurea), Delphinium and Lupine (Lupinus). Think also about Dahlia (Asteraceae), Peony (Paeonia), Wallflower (Erysimum) and Phlox (Polemoniaceae) for bushy foliage and tall flower stems. Enjoy the beauty of your cut flowers and share them with others for years to come.

All home gardeners are welcome to attend free Master Gardener Saturday classes; on Saturday, March 16th the class is 'From Garden to Vase: Annuals and Perennials'. The three-hour class will start at 9:00 AM, in the Veteran's Memorial Building, 130 Placerville Drive in Placerville. Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.