



CREATING A CUT FLOWER GARDEN

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Introduction to the joys of having a year round cut flower garden

The upside of a cut flower garden

- Flowers bring in the beneficials: pollinators and birds
- Having year round cut flowers from your own garden
- They bring beauty to your garden

The downside of a cut flower garden

- Getting through Jan and Feb and suffering through our "harsh winters"
- Commitment to care for the flowers

Have a plan

- Do you have room to establish a cut flower garden?
- Or do you need to incorporate cut flowers into your existing garden?
- If you have room to establish a cut flower garden, do it. You will feel guilt-free when cutting, whereas you won't want to cut from your established garden.
- Get out your pad and paper and sketch out your ideas.
- Where: Are you planting directly in ground, raised beds, pots, wheelbarrows, buckets...?
- Think seasonal; where to plant and when, be thinking ahead, what are you going to plant, direct sow or will you use pony pack plants?
- Know how the sun shines on your garden - North, East, South, West - and how many hours of sun your garden gets.
- Don't: plant tall flowers on the south side, shading other sun loving flowers
- Do: plant tall plants in the back, short in the front for a layered look. Grouping plants together looks good and makes for easy flower harvesting.
- Do: leave room between plants to maneuver about and for maintenance and harvesting.

Preparation – "Be Prepared" the Boy Scout motto

- Stock up: Be proactive, be prepared. Sharpen up your hand shears, have supplies on hand (stakes, tomato cages, trellises, twine, fertilizers, water buckets)
- Soil: Prepare your soil. Happy healthy soil makes for happy healthy flowers. Add organic matter to your soil: compost, worm castings, cured manures, peat moss. If your soil is healthy you won't need to supplement with fertilizers. Consider having your soil tested if your plants are struggling.
- Note: If fertilizing be careful when applying to your plants. Over-fertilizing can become toxic to the plants and to the soil. Be sure to read the recommended dosage and frequency for use.

Water: Drip irrigation or hand watering?

- If drip irrigation: Know your flower's water requirements. Place plants with similar water needs on same line. A water meter gauge is helpful. The good old finger test works just as well.

- If hand watering, consider a watering wand. Wands allow you to reach in and water under plant foliage and to direct the water to the plant base to avoid overhead watering.
- Watering Don'ts: Don't overhead water, why? Exposure to disease. Don't water in late afternoon or evenings, why? Exposure to disease. Fungus grows at night (example: powdery mildew).
- Overhead watering exception: When it's dry and dusty, give your plants a good morning shower to clean off their leaves and pores called stomata. Do you know where the stomata are on your leaves?
- Watering Do's: Water in early hours and avoid overhead watering. Water deep and less frequent.

Get Planting

- Plant what you love, plant what brings you joy!
- Visit your local nursery monthly to see what's in flower, or what bulbs are available.
- Mix perennials, biennials, annuals... do you know the difference?

Annual	Biennial	Perennial:	Fillers
Plants with a life cycle that lasts only one year. They grow from seed, bloom, produce seeds and die in one growing season	A flowering plant that takes two years to complete its biological cycle. In the first year, the plant grows leaves, stems, roots (vegetative structures) then it enters a period of dormancy over the cooler months. During the next spring or summer, the stem of the biennial plant elongates or bolts and the plant flowers producing fruits and seed before it dies.	A plant that lives more than 2 years. Flowering perennials will often die back during the colder months	A flower or foliage used to fill empty spaces between the larger flowers in an arrangement to provide bulk, color, shape and texture.
Bachelor buttons Carnations Cosmos Larkspur Nemisa Scabiosa Snapdragon Sweet Pea Sunflower Verbena Zinnia	Black Eyed Susan Canterbury Bells Clary Sage Euphorbia Forget-Me-Not Foxglove Hollyhock Nigella Stock Sweet William	Alstroemeria Calla Lily Coreopsis Dahlia Daffodil Delphinium Gaillardia Hydrangea Mexican Sage Oriental Lily Penstemon	Dusty Miller Eucalyptus (young branches) Fern Feverfew Jasmine vine Mexican sage Olive (young branches) Passion Vine Queen Anne's Lace Statice

- Other perennials: Bulbs, tubers, corms, rhizomes
- Seeds: Direct sow or start in trays. Larger seeds (good examples are sunflowers) are usually best sown directly.

Now that you have your flowers planned, think about the vase fillers:

- Floral fillers: ferns, trees branches, vines, plants with different textures
- Many designers forage for their floral fillers. If you are going to forage know your plant material. There are many poisonous plants out there. When in doubt, don't forage.

Caring for the flower garden

- Check your flower garden daily, stay on top of things. Once you get behind it's hard to catch up.
- Check for pests "nip 'em in the bud" most common enemies are slugs and snails, birds (bird netting or tulle is a great way to protect seedlings), aphids, white fly, cucumber beetle, gophers, moles.
- Fertilizer is an option if plants are struggling.

- Deadheading – remove spent flower to a new vigorous shoot, you prolong the bloom period by deadheading otherwise the plants will make seed and die.
- Pinch back new growth which builds a more robust plant with branching and more flowers (good examples are cosmos).
- Support your flowers with stakes, cages, trellises.

Harvesting your flowers

- Harvest flowers in the morning. Select flowers with tight centers or those just beginning to open. Have a container of water with you and place cut flowers in the water as you harvest.
- For purchased cut flowers: trim off ½” of the stems while holding in a bowl of water or under running water then place in vase.

Displaying flowers

- Use a clean container to display your flowers. Wash with soapy water to remove possible fungi or bacteria that can promote decay.
- For thin-necked vases, use a bottle brush to aid in cleaning.
- For hard to clean containers, soak in a mixture of one-part bleach and 10 parts water. Rinse well after soaking.
- Do not use water-softened water as it is high in sodium. If you have hard water or softened water, use distilled or reverse osmosis water.
- Flower preservative that come with purchased flowers will make one quart of water. Learn to make your own preservative mixture for home grown cut flowers. Recipes available in the reference below.

Conclusion

If your garden is prospering and you happen to have just too many flowers, consider sharing them with others. Gather them up and share them with a friend, or take them to your local hospital or convalescent home.

Have fun with your flowers, experiment with what works best in your garden and what doesn't. Grow what brings you joy.

“The best way to garden is to put on a wide-brimmed straw hat and some old clothes. And with a hoe in one hand and a cold drink in the other, tell them where you want it planted.”

-Texas Bix Bender, *Don't Throw in the Trowel*

References:

Geisel, Pamela and Unruh, Carolyn. *Extending the Freshness of Cut Flowers at Home*. UCANR. Publication 8113. <https://anrcatalog.ucanr.edu/pdf/8113.pdf>

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