

Planning a Year-Round (Almost) Cutting Flower Garden

Welcome, everyone. I am excited to give a workshop on my favorite subject and passion, flowers. This workshop was very hard to get down on paper because what I really wanted to be doing was working in my garden doing the things I will suggest you do to keep those flowers coming. This workshop is not for you if you want to actually start a flower business, this is for someone who wants to have lots of flowers and fillers to use in bouquets and flower arrangements and give away. Eventually once you get hooked, who knows, we may see your flowers for sale in the future. I hope so, but this is for the beginner to get their feet wet (and hands), have tons of flowers and fillers and still have your perennials beds looking great with flowers galore.

So a brief overview of what we will cover today:

1. Planning and preparing your plot for flowers
2. Maximizing your space if small with succession planting
3. Flowers to grow in different seasons.
4. How to grow and care for healthy plants (spacing, pinching, feedings, deadheading)
5. Start small and experiment
6. Raised beds v. in ground
7. Best methods of growing and harvesting different flowers
8. Products to use (netting, corraling, staking, caging, tunnels, shade cloth)
9. Put together a quick arrangement

So let's get started by defining what a cutting flower garden is. Unlike mixed perennial borders or flower beds with perennials and annuals created for beauty in the garden, cutting flower gardens are gardens where the goal is to cut the flowers for use all season long. Remember, we are growing these flowers to harvest and actually the plants will thank us by producing more flowers. You have all heard of cut and come again zinnias. Well, it's true of many, many flowers. By cutting the flowers, the plants work to produce more flowers instead of vegetative growth and seeds. So it's a win/win story.

So you have decided to start your garden. The first step is to decide where you have space to place your cutting garden. My cutting garden used to be my vegetable garden. In the past I have grown 25-30 indeterminate tomato plants, peppers, eggplants, tomatillos, squash, and basil. Now, as I switch my interests, I devote one bed to my tomatoes (9 or 10) and grow only my favorite peppers, Marconi Red, and have 4 basil plants. I have 10 raised beds that are 4x9' each. I also use large plastic pots, large stone pots and smart cloth pots to grow many of my dahlias. The site gets at least 6 hours of sun a day, some areas more.

Most of the flowers we will talk about today need full sun, which is 6 hours plus a day. Try to site your garden where tree roots will not infiltrate your soil. We here at the garden have a sad story to tell you about tree roots. Watch our progress to see if we can defeat them.

So once you have chosen your site, if it's in the ground you need to mark the corners with stakes, lay out hoses or string or use spray paint to delineate the perimeter of the bed. At this point a soil test is recommended so you know what you are dealing with if one hasn't been done in the area in the past. I will include at least one resource for testing online. If you go to a local comprehensive nursery they will carry the soil test kits there. Follow the instructions of additions to make and feel incredibly lucky if your soil is already great!!

Now it's time to design the plot. Floret Farms, my guru, and incredible flower farmers and producers suggest plots 10x4' (note, my raised beds are 9x4', close enough) with 4' in between beds (mine are closer to 2-3'). You don't want your beds wider than 4' as you won't be able to work, reach and/or harvest your flowers without getting in them and walking on the soil. Once you have the number of beds and size calculated it's time to figure out how many

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plants per bed for the best health and production. Floret Farms has worked long and hard and found a 9x9" spacing works for most annual flowers. With this spacing, each 10x4' bed can support 65 plants. It is closer spacing than many have suggested in the past but it works if your plants are supported properly. Three exceptions are dahlias, space 18" apart or grow individuals in large pots; branching sunflowers, space 18-24" apart; and cosmos space 12" apart. Single stem sunflowers can be spaced much closer, 4-6" apart for tall, small stems and flowers for smaller arrangements.

Next, you need to decide what you want to grow. If your goal is to have flowers at least 3 seasons out of the year, you will need a variety of plants: annuals; hardy annuals; biennials; bulbs, corms and tubers; perennials; vines; shrubs and trees. Obviously not all of these will go into your beds (shrubs and trees) but do scout out your own yard for materials that will work as fillers or berry branches or flowering trees/shrubs that you can use in the winter. You will have more material than you think!

Finding good cutting flowers is much easier now as many of the quality seed companies will now list the flower seeds as "good for cutting." If you are growing dahlias many dedicated dahlia suppliers will list whether the dahlia is a good cut flower or not. From my experience, the bigger the dahlia, the shorter the vase life. However, don't let them stop you from growing one or two of the big boys like Cafe au Lait. They won't disappoint.

How many of you know about nomenclature, meaning the naming of the plants? Well, let me just refresh your memory because plants have botanical names which includes the genus, species, and if there is one, a variety, and almost all plants also have a common name, which is great most of the time until two plants end up with the same common name. So when buying a plant or seed you will see Genus, species and 'Variety,' for example, *Zinnia elegans* 'Benary's Giant Wine.'

So what should you start with and when? As we are already in late spring, soon to be the beginning of summer, your annual plants hopefully have already been started or you can buy starts. Starting with annuals makes perfect sense as they are easy, fast and economical if you buy seeds. There are a number of good seed companies and I will list those in resources. We won't cover seed starting today, but there is a workshop on our website called "From Seed to Vase" that demonstrates methods for starting seeds as well as harvesting information.

So you have your beds laid out, you have done a soil test and added whatever amendments are needed and you want your soil to support healthy plants. As Erin Benzakein of Floret Farms says, "Everything begins with the soil." Compost is your best friend. We recommend growing organically, as we do, which is harder for sure, but so much better for your soil and you. I recommend once your beds are planted be sure to check on them every day. That way you find the problems at the beginning (aphids, mites, white flies, thrips, powdery mildew, etc.) and are able to take care of them immediately before they get out of hand. I recommend drip irrigation or soaker hoses for many reasons: uses significantly less water, puts the water where it is needed, does not get the foliage wet. Once your soil is amended and fertilized (add an organic fertilizer at the beginning and dig in) lay your irrigation down. If you are growing in raised beds or containers, the weeds are not really an issue. If you are growing in the ground, I recommend following Floret Farms methods of laying weed cloth and burning holes for each plant. And now the best part of all (almost), planting your starts. My favorite tools for planting depending on the size of the plant ranges from a butter knife to a hori hori or hand trowel. Plant late in the day, firm soil around your plant gently and water well. If it is going to be really hot, wait to plant if you can or use shade cloth the first few days so the plants get acclimated. Most likely your soil has already warmed to 60 degrees, so a layer of mulch can be put in your beds. This will keep the water from splashing on the foliage, will suppress weeds, will conserve water and keep the roots cooler.

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Let's talk briefly about succession planting, which is just what it says, sowing seeds at intervals so you are able to harvest flowers over a longer period of time. And, remember, you can go up with vines that take up less room in the bed. In my garden I have not utilized this method completely but I have started. Last year I planted my zinnia and cosmos starts at the beginning of June and then direct seeded two beds three weeks later with just cosmos. It was the first time I grew 'Rose Bonbon' cosmos and it loved being direct sown. I will try it with zinnias this year. Also, I follow my ranunculus and anemones with zinnias. This year my dahlias were left in the ground, heavily mulched (I am at about 2500' in NC) with rice straw and did great until our late last freeze. The growth was already quite tall (some at least 1') and while I covered it with straw it wasn't deep enough and the tops turned black. Next year I will use a frost tunnel with the straw. But my point is I have hundreds of poppies, Larkspur, sweet peas and Nigella. I let the poppies, Larkspur and sweet peas go wild in my dahlia beds. Right now they are absolutely popping but in the next two weeks they will be pulled and the dahlias will be much happier.

At this point I want to cover SOME of the plants you can grow in Nevada County during the different seasons. I encourage you to walk around your garden and see what might work as fillers or even entire arrangements. I found *Daphne transatlantica* works great for small arrangements, flowers almost all year round, is evergreen and smells lovely. I harvested *Holodiscus*, a native, in my yard and found it held up using a few tricks we use for woody plants. Same with Strawberry Bush and Red Twig Dogwood. Even my Manzanita 'Howard McMinn' when flowering was lovely in small arrangements. I will give additional information on summer flowers but you will have to do some research on your own for the other seasons. Otherwise, we would be here all day and night!

SUMMER FLOWERS

We will start with a list of SUMMER flowers that I recommend for beginners and experts alike with growing recommendations.

1. Zinnias - plant seeds 4-6 weeks before last frost, pinch at 10-12", use netting. Please refer to our workshop online for more information.
2. Sunflowers - best to direct seed when soil has warmed, pinch branching types, not single stem, use Procut or other varieties without pollen for arranging
3. Cosmos - plant seeds (indoors) 4-6 weeks before last frost, pinch at 10-12", use netting or staking. Please refer to our workshop online for more information.
4. Dahlias - plant tubers/seeds/stem cuttings, pinch at 10-12", stake or corral. Please refer to our workshop on dahlias on our website for more information.
5. Delphiniums - plant seeds 10-14 weeks before last frost (short-lived perennial - 3 years or so), support strongly recommended, don't bury crown when planting, blooms early June.
6. Scabiosa (favorites are Black Knight, Salmon Queen and Summer Sangria) - hardy annual (lasts 3 years in my garden so far) - plant seeds 8-10 weeks before last frost, pinch at 8", use netting.
7. Snapdragons - plant seeds 8 to 10 weeks before last frost or plant starts about a month before last frost (can take cold). Seeds are extremely small. Use netting. Should pinch for more flowers. Pinch when plant has 5 sets of leaves, snip top and leave 3 sets of leaves.
8. Yarrow - plant seeds 8-10 weeks before last frost. Harvest when at least 3/4 of florets are open and pollen is showing; otherwise, they may wilt if picked too early.
9. Roses - plant bare root or potted, summer and fall bloom. I love roses (except for the thorns, but with my organic gardening methods and being very busy, I have two insects that do a lot of damage to my buds in spring, curculio and hoplias (also attack my light-colored peonies and even iris). The hoplias seem to prefer light-colored roses, white, yellow, pink, but if really needing more food even my Mr. Lincoln has had them. Best method is hand picking but you need to look every day. The literature says March to May

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but I definitely still find them in June just when my roses are beginning to flower. That said, if you harvest your roses, cut in the evening or early morning, have container with lukewarm water, strip leaves below water line, snip at 45 degree angle, use flower food. Can refrigerate to prolong life (no fruit in refrigerator). Change water. These instructions can apply to most cut flowers.

10. Summer filler plants include basil ('Cinnamon' and 'Dark Opal' my favorites), Daucus/Ammi, Daphne transatlantica, Scented Geranium (Pelargonium) (my favorites are 'Attar of Roses and Chocolate Mint.) Also mint (do not grow in beds, use containers), and I use Red Twig Dogwood, the smaller stems. Feverfew is great, green or chartreuse. Ninebark is also a very nice filler in green and red. One of my favorite fillers was Hibiscus Mahogany Splendor. Baby's Breath or Cynoglossum. The list goes on and on and I need to stop.

FALL FLOWERS/PLANTS

1. Dahlias
2. Asters - New York or designer asters
3. Zinnias
4. Chrysanthemums - grow from starts, use netting to support, short-day plant, blooms September to frost, mulch. Divide every 2/3 years in spring.
5. Ornamental Cabbage
6. Grasses
7. Chinese Lantern - fresh or dried, grow in pots, vigorous.
8. Japanese Anemone - Harvest when fully open but before pollen drop
9. Sedum
10. Amaranth - plant seeds 4-6 weeks before last frost or direct seed. Large plants, 12" apart. Best varieties are 'Opopeo' (crimson upright), 'Emerald Tassles' (hanging green, large) and 'Coral Fountains' (pink hanging)
11. Fillers - Viburnum branches, rose hips, Smoke Tree (Cotinus)

WINTER FLOWERS/PLANTS

1. Amaryllis
2. Poinsettia
3. Cedar
4. Cypress
5. Snowberry
6. Clematis seed heads
7. Ornamental Cabbage
8. Azalea foliage
9. Bunny Tails Grass
10. Pepper Tree berries
11. Holly berries
12. Kale
13. Hellebore
14. Forsythia
15. Nandina foliage
16. Boxwood
17. Privet berries

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SPRING FLOWERS/PLANTS

1. Tulips
2. Daffodils
3. Hyacinth
4. Grape Hyacinth
5. Leucojum
6. Alliums
7. Peonies
8. Sweet peas
9. Honeysuckle
10. Forget-me-nots
11. Lilies
12. Oakleaf Hydrangea
13. Hydrangeas
14. Iceland poppies
15. Hellebores
16. Columbine
17. Daphne (bush)
18. Snapdragons
19. Ranunculus
20. Anemones
21. Larkspur
22. Bunny Tail's Grass
23. Lilac
24. Nigella
25. Mock Orange (Philadelphus)
26. Lupine
27. Calendula
28. Flowering branches (cherry, crabapple, Doublefile viburnum and snowball bush (*Viburnum opulus*))
29. Fillers: *Silene vulgaris* (Blushing lanterns), Bells of Ireland

Resources:

1. Cut Flower Garden by Erin Benzakein with Julie Chai.
2. A Year In Flowers by Erin Benzakein with Jill Jorgensen and Julie
3. Seed companies: Floret Farms, Johnny's Selected Seeds, Select Seeds, Burpee and Swallowtail Gardens
4. Dahlias: Swan Island Dahlias, Nevada County Master Gardeners
5. Soil testing: Umass Soil and Plant Tissue Testing Lab