



## Consider a Cutting Garden

By Dawn Pettinelli, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

There is something so soothing about a bouquet of flowers brought indoors to brighten a breakfast nook, serve as a dining table centerpiece or just adorn a bedside or bathroom. A bit of outdoors and nature has been transported to our indoor, often staid, environments. Cut flower arrangements need not be large, meticulously designed, or exuberant. A simple bouquet of daisies or zinnias can be pleasing, well suited to the indoor placement and be had for a minimal cost. The key is to bridge the gap between the outdoors and the indoors.

When thinking about cut flowers, it may help to put them into a few categories. Most prolific blossom producers are generally the cut and come again annuals including sunflowers, zinnias, marigolds, globe amaranth, celosia and more. Summer flowering bulbs that are particularly well suited for arrangements include gladioli and dahlias.



Whimsical garden cut flower arrangement. Photo by dmp2009.

The plethora of other plant materials that can be used in bouquets and arrangements is almost endless. There are lots and lots of perennials like foxgloves, delphiniums, phlox, lupines, asters,

mums, echinops, rudbeckia, alchemilla as well as biennials like sweet William, clary sage and Canterbury bells that are great to add to bouquets when in bloom.

There is still plenty of time to create a cutting garden, whether using purchased transplants or starting a few quick growers, like zinnias, marigolds and sunflowers from seeds. Tuck them in between rows of vegetables or in perennial beds where there are some open spaces. I just planted the last of my zinnias, cosmos, marigolds, and sunflowers this past weekend.

As with almost any flower, the more sun, the better. At least 6 hours of direct sun each day is necessary for copious blossoms. Especially the quick growing annuals, whether from seed or transplants, require fertile, well-drained soil for optimal flower production. Without results from a soil test, purchase a general all purpose fertilizer, either synthetic or natural, and apply as directed. If plants are already set in the garden and no fertilizer was added before planting, topdress lightly around each plant, now and again in midsummer to keep those blossoms coming.

It is probably too late to order seeds but check out local garden centers to see if any desired ones are left on the racks. If you decide that a cutting garden is the perfect addition to your yard, be sure to check out plant catalogs and websites early next year to select and purchase choice varieties. For instance, two exciting cultivars in the realm of zinnias are the 'Queeny' series featuring pastel pinks and oranges touched with lime and the 'Zinderella' series with their unique tufted centers.

As far as sunflowers go, pollenless cultivars are preferred for indoor cut flowers but keep in mind that they do not produce pollen for pollinators or seed for birds; they do produce nectar for bees and other pollinators, however. I like to plant some of each. 'Chianti' is a favorite red of mine but pollenless. 'Autumn Beauty' comes in a mixture of colors while 'Sonja' is a deep gold and both provide both pollen and nectar.

All the taller cosmos (*C. bipinnatus*) add an air of delicacy to bouquets but my favorite is 'Sea Shells'. I have some self-seeding feathered celosia but last year grew celosia 'Kurume Corona' from seed and was treated to the most magnificent crested cockscombs of fuchsia and pale gold.

For bouquet fillers, I tend to rely on self-seeding annuals, herbs and perennials. For years now, white nigella, tall purple verbena, bupleurum, ammi, and white and bluish purple tall cutting ageratums vigorously self-seed and I have to thin them down to a manageable amount. Mints, artemesias, ferns and some succulents also provide outstanding accompaniments to floral arrangements.

So, consider growing at least a few flowers for cutting. Start small, gather the blooms for indoor arrangements as casual or elaborate as you like and you'll probably be hooked into growing more and more blooming plants that can adorn both the inside and outside of your abode.

For information about selecting or growing cut flowers or on any home or garden topic, contact the UConn Home & Garden Education Center, toll-free in CT, at (877) 486-6271, visit us at [www.ladybug.uconn.edu](http://www.ladybug.uconn.edu) or call your local Cooperative Extension Center.

