



## DIY – Grow Flowers for Cutting

By Dawn Pettinelli, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

Do you just love fresh flower arrangements for the table or even that single bloom in a vase by your bedside? Wouldn't it feel great to just stroll out your back door, clip some blossoms, bring them inside and enjoy their beauty? There's no reason that you can't. Even a small yard or garden space can yield blossoms for cutting.

While many of us have flowering perennials and even woody plants that make for great arrangements, perhaps a dedicated cut flower planting would provide many more stems for cutting and not create any empty spaces in our garden designs. When planning your cut flower garden, first decide where it should go. The majority of blooming plants need at least 6 to 8 hours of sun each day, a well-drained, fertile soil and adequate water during dry spells. As with all garden plants, a soil test is a great way to find out what is needed to add to soils before planting but without a soil test, follow the directions on fertilizer packages.



There's still time to prepare new beds for cut flower plantings but another alternative would be to turn over part of the vegetable garden to cut flower production. Probably your vegetable garden already has great soil and is located in a sunny area.

The hardest part of designing a cut flower garden is selecting what plants to grow. There are so many beautiful and exciting flowers to choose from. A good suggestion is to grow easy flowers at first and then progress on to more demanding ones. Another important factor to consider is which flowers need to be purchased as transplants (or started inside earlier under lights) and which can be easily grown by sowing seeds directly in the garden. While there are a number of flowering plants that can be started by direct seeding, you'll get faster blooms if you purchase or grow your own transplants.



Some that I typically grow each year from seed are zinnias, the tall African marigolds, cosmos, bachelor buttons, calendulas, nasturtiums, and some sunflowers. Cool weather calendulas and bachelor buttons can be sown now but wait until later in the month to plant the rest. A number of cutting annuals will self-seed if blossoms are allowed to mature and the beds are not heavily mulched. Some that spring up for me include ageratums, verbena, ammi, nigella, and wheat celosia. If you have some known self-seeders, wait a bit longer to prepare or till beds to see what sprouts.

Those best purchased as transplants include rudbeckia, snapdragons, cleome, stock, strawflowers, globe amaranth, tithonia, asters and amaranth. Some might have tiny seeds or be slower to germinate or just need a longer time until they produce flowers so starting with transplants may be a good option.

Two annual bulbs that are great for cutting are gladioli and dahlias. A few glad corms can be planted every other week until about mid-June to provide a summer full of spiky, colorful blooms. Dahlia tubers planted mid-May generally start producing blooms by late July but continue until a heavy frost.

There really are quite a few potential cut flower candidates to choose from. Feel free to select whatever colors and flower forms appeal to you most. From a designer's viewpoint, consider what colors would be most compatible with where you want to place arrangements indoors. Also, whether making more formal arrangements or informal bouquets, flower shape plays a prominent role. Often the most attractive arrangements are filled with an assortment of shapes featuring a focal flower, spiky exclamation points, mounded shapes to hold the arrangement together, greenery for filling spaces and delicate airy springs to lighten the mood. I find mints, artemisia, and ferns make good fillers while grasses, kalimeris, boltonia, and white wood asters provide an airy touch.

The majority of annual flowers do fine at about a 9 by 9 inch spacing so you can pack them in pretty close. Do note that for copious blooms, a fertile soil and adequate water are essential. Maintenance also includes dead-heading, or removal of spent flowers to encourage the production of more blooms. Keep an eye out for plant pests as well.

Even beginning gardeners can set aside some space to grow beautiful flowers for enjoyment indoors. Try out a few this year, make notes on their performance and change up the plant roster as they gain your approval or not.

For cultural information on growing various species of cut flowers or on other gardening topics, feel free to contact us, toll-free, at the UConn Home & Garden Education Center at (877) 486-6271, visit our website at [www.homegarden.cahnr.uconn.edu](http://www.homegarden.cahnr.uconn.edu) or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.