

Cutting Garden: Grow Your Own Bouquets

By Valerie Jean Rose

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“The springtime’s pallid landscape
Will glow like bright bouquet...” Emily Dickinson



Planning and Growing a ‘Cutting Garden’

The gifts of flowers are manifold. To hummingbirds, butterflies, bees and other insects, flowers are sources of nectar and pollen. Some flowers are lovely edible salad garnishes, and all blooms feed the souls of gardeners, lucky friends and passersby. Many flowers can only be enjoyed where they’re planted, as they refuse the domesticity of the vase and quickly wilt once cut. But some varieties retain their stamina and color once they are gathered into a bouquet and brought inside to brighten your home. Creating a ‘cutting garden’ of these flowers gives months of pleasure, with ever-changing combinations of fragrances and colors enlivening your home.

I learned this from Beth Hailey, who has grown flowers, herbs and a few vegetables organically in La Conner since 1981. She transforms these flowers into lip balms, salves, massage oils and facial creams, sold through her business, Dona Flora. Hailey also sells packages of flower arrangements for weddings, drawing from her extensive cutting garden. “A cutting garden is planted with flower varieties that cut and last well in a vase,” she says. “Cut flowers can be grown anywhere, but they are generally taller. [They] will require careful placement and possible staking.” This makes sense – you want long stems for cut flowers, so groundcovers and short, bushy plants like marigolds need not apply for inclusion in a cutting garden. Those low-growing have other uses in the garden.



Photo courtesy Beth Hailey / **Ideal cutting flowers are easy to grow and have long, strong stems.**

What about folks living in apartments or condos? “A cutting garden can be grown in containers,” Hailey notes. “Annuals are better suited to containers [than perennials] because they can be packed together better than most perennials.” Planting annuals, which only live for one season, also allows you to change your selection every year! As with any container garden, be sure your plants get the amount of water and sun they want.

Since Hailey is such an experienced cut-flower grower, I asked her which easiest-to-grow flowers she would recommend for beginning gardeners? “Dahlias (buy a start, not seeds), sunflowers (sow seeds), amaranth (seeds),

calendula (seeds) and larkspur (seeds) are fairly easy annuals,” Hailey listed. “All but the calendula will need staking. [These] five I listed above are primarily easy to get started and produce a fair number of flowers. That being said, they are not necessarily the five easiest flowers for everyone to grow. I think people do best with flowers they are attracted to. And most perennials will grow for anyone if you buy a start. So anyone can succeed!”

Your success, and your enjoyment, will increase with more knowledge about starting and maintaining a cutting garden. Beth Hailey generously shares her decades of experience in the upcoming Master Gardeners' Know and Grow workshop 'For Garden to Vase: Grow Your Own Bouquets.' Join Hailey Tuesday, March 16, 1 - 2:30pm, at the WSU Mount Vernon NW Research and Extension Center, 16650 Memorial Highway/State Route 536. While you're there, see what's starting to grow in the Discovery Gardens! For more information, phone 360-428-4270.

10 flowers to grow

"My ideal cut flower would be easy to grow; have long, strong stems; have lots of flowers over a long season; be fragrant and last in a vase for at least a week. Here is a list of the 10 plants I rely on most."

Dahlias - From mid-summer to frost, there is probably no more productive plant for cut flowers than dahlias.

Winter daphne - (variegated) *Daphne odora* 'Marginata' is a shade-loving shrub I use often for foliage. From January through at least March the little clusters of super-fragrant, pink flowers make it the basis for winter bouquets.

Feverfew - These seed themselves year after year around my garden. If they aren't in the way, I leave them for a long-lasting filler flower.

Godetia - It is easy from seed and may self-sow. It has stalks of satiny flowers in shades of pink and purple that have a great vase-life.

Larkspur - Another flower that conveniently self-sows, this flower is terrific to add brilliant blue (or white, pink or lavender) to your arrangements.

Peonies - Pick them just as the buds are opening to avoid bringing in ants. Choose a fragrant cultivar and you have a nearly perfect cut-flower plant.

Roses - I tend to chose cultivars for fragrance, not disease resistance.

Snapdragons - My favorite is the Rocket strain, which make tall spires of blooms in various colors.

Sunflowers - Nothing says summer like sunflowers and there are so many nice cultivars to choose from now. You probably don't want to grow 'Mammoth Russian,' since it's hard to arrange blossoms that are a foot across.

Zinnias - These annual beauties have a tremendously long season. Zinnias are slug candy, so keep the bait traps handy.

(excerpted from 'Growing Flowers for Cutting,' Holly Kennel, Snohomish County Cooperative Extension Service: <http://gardening.wsu.edu/column/10-05.htm>)



Photo courtesy Beth Hailey / A cutting garden is planted with fragrant, colorful flower varieties, like peonies, daisies, sweet peas, zinnias and dahlias, that when cut last well in a vase.