

Cut Flower Arrangements

By Claudia Wells
December 2, 2016



Create your own bouquets

One of the most rewarding aspects of growing flowers is the opportunity to create beautiful bouquets from your own garden. Before cutting flowers for your arrangement there are several things to consider.

To begin with, where will you be putting the flowers? You can put them in the middle of a table, which would call for a round arrangement viewed from all sides. If you put them behind something on a table behind the couch, and only one side is visible, then you will not use as many flowers. If you are going to put them in a corner perhaps you would want a one sided arrangement.

You can find a simple introduction to flower arranging that discusses all of these principles in detail online or at the library.

What kind of vase will you be using? Is it short or tall? This will determine the length of the flowers to be cut. Does it have a lip that encourages flowers to spill over as in nature? It is best not to get a vase with straight up and down edges if you are a beginning floral designer, as it is harder to make the flower vase and flowers blend together.

How will you hold the flowers in the vase? You could use marbles in any color and fill the vase about half full, then add water. Or, you can use wet foam after you have soaked it in a sink overnight. This ensures your flowers stay exactly where you placed them; this is also a good tactic if you will be transporting the flower arrangement.

Always cut the flowers at an angle if you will be using floral foam. There is also a chicken wire-like net that you can put on top of the vase and then crimp it around the lip. Insert the flowers through the holes to stabilize them. A little Spanish moss to drape over the edge of an arrangement will make it look more natural.

Now that you know the where, what and why, let's go on to flowers that are best for cutting in your own backyard. Cut flowers in the early morning. Bring a pail of water with you and immediately place the flowers in the pail, then remove all of the bottom leaves. If the leaves stay on, they are sucking up nutrients as well as encouraging disease if they are water-logged.



Left: A simple arrangement can be made from a variety of plants in your garden. For example, fern leaves were used to add some height to this small bouquet of viburnum.

Above: Be sure to cut stems at an angle before inserting them into an arrangement. *All 3 photos by Nancy Crowell / WSU Skagit County Master Gardener.*

Get the flowers inside a cool place as soon as possible. Cut your flowers to length—again underwater—before making your arrangement. This ensures that the stem takes up as much water and food as it can instead of being blocked by air in the stem. Always use flower preservative to prolong the life of the bouquet.

For a larger arrangement, flowers with erect, tall stems are ideal. Flowers with large flower heads like garden phlox help fill in a bouquet with their fluffy blooms, making for a full arrangement. Many people use baby's breath as a filler to complete the bouquet. Perennial and annual flowers alike are excellent cut flowers. Some examples to grow are: pot marigold (*Calendula officinalis*), cosmos (*Cosmos bipinnatus*), Mexican sunflower (*Tithonia rotundiflora*), yellow flag (*Iris pseudacorus*), black-eyed susan (*Rudbeckia fulgida* var. *sullivantii*), snapdragon (*Antirrhinum majus*), purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*), marigold (*Tagetes* spp.), poppy (*Papaver somniferum*), horsemint (*Monarda punctata*), indigo spires sage (*Salvia* 'Indigo Spires'), calliopsis (*Coreopsis tinctoria*), mums (*Chrysanthemum* hybrids), purple top verbena (*Verbena bonariensis*), and flame nasturtium (*Tropaeolum speciosum*). Some of these are annuals and some are perennials, which will come back year after year for your enjoyment.

We have an abundance of flowers in our own yards, as well as our friends' and neighbors' yards. Happy flower arranging.



Think about where your arrangement will go, as well as the size and shape of your vase. Will it be seen from all sides, or will it only need to be full on one side?

RESOURCES:

- “Best Fresh-Cut Flowers.” Julie Bohlke. www.gardenguides.com. 2016.
- “Fifteen Fast-Growing Flowers for a Cutting Garden.” www.thisoldhouse.com. 2016.

Claudia Wells is a Washington State University/Skagit County Master Gardener. Questions may be submitted to the WSU Skagit County Extension Office, 11768 Westar Lane, Suite A, Burlington, WA 98233. 360-428-4270 or skagit.wsu.edu/MG.