

Growing Your Own Bouquets

By Claudia Wells
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A special cutting garden

Now is the time you might be curled up in your chair by the fire. Like many, you may be looking over your favorite seed catalogues and many ideas are spinning in your head. Consider growing your own flowers for bouquets. You could have what is called a “cutting garden.” This would be a small space tucked away that would have only plants to be used for cut flowers—that way you wouldn’t have to take any flowers from your main garden area.

The first thing to do would be to evaluate the soil where your new plants will be going. If you would like to have your soil tested so that you know specifically what amendments should be added, we have at least two soil test labs in the area and your results are back to you quickly.

Remember that planting in the soil must wait until the ground is no longer frozen or water-logged and the temperature no longer dips into the 30’s °F. You can do a quick home test to see if your soil is too wet by tightly squeezing a fist-sized clump. If it stays in a wet log—does not crumble--it is too soon to plant.

Make sure to research the criteria for making your plants flourish in your garden by following a master gardener creed: “Right plant, right place.” You will be wasting money if you put the wrong plant in the wrong location.

When choosing your plants consider the following: Does the plant require sun or shade? What are its watering needs? How big does it get? Where will it fit in your garden? Do you want the plant to come back year after year--a perennial? Or do you want something for just one year--an annual?

Give some thought to the colors you like the most and search for plants in that color range when studying your seed catalogues. When does the plant bloom and for how long? If you choose flowers that bloom in different periods, like spring, summer or fall, you will have flowers to cut for many months.

Don’t choose anything with a woody stem for cutting, as it usually does not continue to take up water in the vase and might be short-lived in a floral arrangement. Also investigate how straight the flower stems are—generally straighter stems are best.

There are many desirable flowers to use in an arrangement, such as *Iris*, *Phlox*, *Coreopsis*, lavender—basically anything big, small and in between, as well as roses which should be replaced when they wilt in the arrangement.



Cosmos come in a variety of colors, from light pink to lavender to white, and make an excellent cut flower for arrangements. *Photo by Nancy Crowell / WSU Skagit County Extension Master Gardener.*

Others include *Rudbeckia*, black-eyed Susan, which is available in many colors ranging from yellow to bronze to mahogany. It has a sturdy stem and is long lasting.

Alstroemeria (Peruvian lily) is another great long-lasting cut flower. It ranges in height from 1-4 feet tall with yellow, orange or orange-red flowers liberally sprinkled with dark flecks.

Ornamental *Amaranth*, which is grown for its brightly colored foliage and unusual drooping flower tassels, can grow as long as 4 feet. The tassels can be cut and tucked into the sides of bouquets, then allowed to spill over the vase which gives a natural effect to your arrangement.

Cosmos is a real winner with heights ranging from 2-4 feet and many colors from which to choose. It will bloom all summer.

Echinacea purpurea (coneflower) has a perfectly straight stem and is very long-lasting. You can even pluck off the petals once they get droopy to leave just the cone as an accent in your arrangement.

These are just a few suggestions for a cutting garden. There are many plants that grow well in our area and that will produce a variety of flowers over a long period. Unfortunately, with all the choices available to the home gardener, you may be forced to whittle it down to a few because of space limitations.



Left: Ornamental Amaranth, which is grown for its brightly colored foliage and unusual drooping flower tassels, can grow as long as 4 feet. The tassels can be cut and tucked into the sides of bouquets, then allowed to spill over the vase. **Top Right:** Coreopsis' vibrant colors can add life to your homemade bouquets. **Bottom Right:** The unique look of Echinacea can add texture to flower arrangements. *Photos by Nancy Crowell / WSU Skagit County Extension Master Gardener.*

Visit your favorite bookstore or search on-line for more cut flower suggestions. But remember: "Right plant, right place."

Your own floral arrangement from your very own cutting garden would be such a special gift to take with you when you are invited to a friend's home.

Happy arranging.

RESOURCES:

- "Best Fresh-Cut Flowers." Julie Bohlke. <https://www.gardenguides.com/>
- "Fifteen Fast-Growing Flowers for a Cutting Garden." <https://www.thisoldhouse.com/ask-this-old-house>
- The Year in Bloom. Ann Lovejoy.

Note: some hyperlinks in this article have been updated since its initial publication.