

Cutflower Gardening

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The information on the care and handling of cut plant materials, floral preservatives, and special treatments is provided by Jim Johnson, AAF, AIFD, TMF, Director of the Benz School of Floral Design at Texas A & M University, and Kimberly Williams, SAIFD.

Garden flowers are more popular than ever for decorating homes. They are particularly fitting in restored homes where the correct flowers for the period of the home can be provided. Garden flowers are not likely to look out of place as sometimes do exotic blossoms from afar. Not to be overlooked is the economy of having one's own source for cutflowers. Some gardeners are even creating a business of growing and marketing cutflowers.

There are several advantages to creating a cutting garden. Where flowers are enjoyed and used in large volume in the home, their removal from borders and other landscaped areas may detract from the intended effect. By providing a special cutflower garden, the gardener can anticipate and plan for these needs without disturbing or diminishing landscape plantings. The well-planned cutting garden also offers another very practical advantage: annuals and perennials may be conveniently and efficiently grown in rows where they are easily gathered and maintained.

Cutting gardens need not be unattractive, but it is sensible to plan to locate them in an area where they are not a focal point when not at their peak. Old-time gardeners often included cutflowers in the vegetable garden where they could tend and harvest them easily. Finer estates would sometimes have a separate area devoted to producing the favorite cutflowers of the family, but annuals such as marigolds, zinnias, poppies, sweet peas, bells of Ireland, celosia, nasturtium, globe amaranth, and larkspur were frequently found in vegetable and cutting gardens of our ancestors. Shasta daisies, phlox, and chrysanthemums were especially popular perennials.

Also popular for cutting are certain shrubs such as forsythia, flowering quince, weigela, and mock orange. Foliage from trees, shrubs, and vines such as magnolia, aspidistra, elaeagnus, English ivy, and ferns is useful in floral designs, and is often found in home landscapes.

Attached is a list of some annuals and perennials that are useful as cutflowers and can be grown in our area. Also attached is information on the care and handling of cut plant materials, floral preservatives, and special treatments.

Care and Handling of Cut Plant Materials

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- Harvest garden flowers during the coolest time of day when they are crisp and turgid—early morning or late evening. However, if the flowers have been purchased, remove the wrappings and bindings so the stems can be separated.
- Remove lower foliage that would remain underwater in the storage container.

- Cut stems with a sharp instrument, making the cuts underwater if possible. This prevents air bubbles from 'clogging' the stems.
- Place the materials in clean containers of lukewarm water with preservative added (room temperature up to 100 degrees F.).
- Always keep cut material in water while designing. This will prevent wilt due to the loss of water through transpiration.
- Always design in clean containers that have been filled with preservative water.
- After each use, clean storage containers, vases, liners, and needle point holders with a soapy Clorox7 solution, to kill all bacteria.
- Use a floral preservative to provide nutrients and to prevent bacterial growth.

FLORAL PRESERVATIVES

The formula for floral preservatives is simple. It consists of three prime ingredients:

- Sugar (dextrose, not table sugar). It provides a carbohydrate energy source so flowers can carry on the process of respiration. This helps buds to develop into flowers.
- Biocide (controls the growth of bacteria). Without it, the addition of sugar to lukewarm water would increase bacteria which would plug the stems and shorten the life of the cut flower.
- Acidifier (lowers the pH of the water and improves water uptake).

(Commercial floral preservatives may be purchased in liquid or powder form at retail florists. Be sure to follow the instructions exactly as written. A perfectly acceptable home substitute is Listerine mouthwash. (one ounce of Listerine per gallon of water will provide the correct solution).)

SPECIAL TREATMENTS

Plants vary in composition and growth habit; therefore, care and handling techniques may vary.

- Avoid using the tender new growth of most plants, as it has not developed a cell structure sturdy enough to keep it from wilting.
- Short-lived blossoms such as daylilies, hibiscus, iris, lotus, magnolia, and passion flowers should be cut in the bud stage and allowed to open in the finished design.
- The long standing practice of crushing woody stems is not recommended, because this damages the cell structure and actually impedes water uptake. Make a clean cut instead.
- Blossoms with tremendous petal surface area compared to their small stem size benefit from being submerged in water at room temperature.
- Depending on their petal substance and color, blossoms can remain underwater for a few minutes (white and pastel camellias, gardenias, orchids and roses) to a few hours (anthuriums gerberas, hydrangeas, lilacs, dark colored roses and most other tropical flowers). Wilted flowers can be revived by cutting the stem underwater and submerging the entire flower until revived.

PERENNIALS

Yarrow	<i>Achillea</i> spp.
Coral Vine	<i>Antigonon leptopus</i>
Aster	<i>Aster</i> spp.
Ornamental Onions	<i>Allium</i> spp.
Peruvian Lily	<i>Alstroemeria pulchella</i>
Columbine	<i>Aquilegia</i> spp.
Butterfly Weed	<i>Asclepias</i> spp.
Aspidistra	<i>Aspidistra elatior</i>
Garden Asparagus	<i>Asparagus officinalis</i>
Canna	<i>Canna x generalis</i>
Chrysanthemum	<i>Chrysanthemum x morifolium</i>
Shasta Daisy	<i>Chrysanthemum x superbum</i>
Oxeye Daisy	<i>Chrysanthemum leucanthemum</i>
Clerodendrum	<i>Clerodendrum x speciosum</i>
Coreopsis	<i>Coreopsis lanceolata</i>
Crinum	<i>Crinum</i> spp.
Montbretia	<i>Crocsmia pottsii</i>
Gardens Pinks and Carnations	<i>Dianthus</i> spp.
Purple Coneflower	<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>
Hardy Ageratum	<i>Eupatorium coelestinum</i>
Ferns	<i>Dryopteris normalis</i>
Leatherleaf Fern	<i>Rumohra adiantiformis</i>
Gerbera Daisy	<i>Gerbera jamesonii</i>
Gingers	<i>Alpinia, Costus, Curcuma,</i> <i>Hedychium, Zinziber</i>
Gladiolus	<i>Gladiolus x hortulanus</i>
Sunflower	<i>Helianthus</i> spp.
Amaryllis	<i>Hippeastrum</i> spp.
Hyacinth	<i>Hyacinthus</i> spp.
Iris	<i>Iris</i> spp.
Red Hot Poker	<i>Kniphofia uvaria</i>
Snowflake	<i>Leucojum aestivum</i>
Liatris, Gayfeather	<i>Liatris</i> spp.
Lily	<i>Lilium candidum, L. tigrinum,</i> <i>L. formosanum</i>
Spider Lily	<i>Lycoris radiata</i>
Purple Loosestrife	<i>Lythrum salicaria</i>
Narcissus, Daffodils	<i>Narcissus</i> spp.
Penstemon	<i>Penstemon</i> spp.
Summer Phlox	<i>Phlox paniculata</i>
Obedient Plant	<i>Physostegia virginiana</i>
Balloon Flower	<i>Platycodon grandiflorus</i>
Tuberose	<i>Polianthes tuberosa</i>
Salvia	<i>Salvia leucantha</i>
Indigo Spires	<i>S. X 'Indigo Spires'</i>
Butterfly Vine	<i>Stigmaphyllon ciliatum</i>
Stoke's Aster	<i>Stokesia laevis</i>
Mexican Marigold	
Mint	<i>Tagetes lucida</i>
Society Garlic	<i>Tulbaghia violacea</i>
Calla Lily	<i>Zantedeschia aethiopica</i>

ANNUALS

French Hollyhock	<i>Althea zebrina, Malva sylestris</i> <i>zebrina</i>
Snapdragon	<i>Antirrhinum majus</i>
Calendula	<i>Calendula officinalis</i>
Cockscomb	<i>Celosia argentia</i>
Cornflower	<i>Centaurea cyanus</i>
Cleome	<i>Cleome hasslerana</i>
Cosmos	<i>Cosmos bipinnatus</i>
Feverfew	<i>Chrysanthemum parthenium</i>
Hyacinth Bean	<i>Dolichos lablab</i>
Bluebell	<i>Eustoma grandiflora</i>
Globe Amaranth (Bachelor Button)	<i>Gomphrena globosa</i>
Baby's Breath	<i>Gypsophila paniculata</i>
Sunflower	<i>Helianthus annuus</i>
Larkspur	<i>Consolida ajaris</i>
Pinks	<i>Dianthus plumarius</i>
Candytuft	<i>Iberis umbellata</i>
Standing Cypress	<i>Ipomopsis rubra</i>
Sweetpea	<i>Lathyrus odoratus</i>
Stock	<i>Mathiola incana</i>
Statice	<i>Limonium</i> spp.
Nasturtium	<i>Tropaeolum majus</i>
Marigold	<i>Tagetes</i> spp.
Pansy	<i>Viola tricolor</i>
Zinnia	<i>Zinnia elegans</i>

*Parts of the above and additional information are from
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