

Grow a Colorful Cutting Garden

Fresh-cut, home-grown flowers transform a house into a home. Learn how to grow a cutting garden.

By Jean M. Fogle

About the Author

Jean M. Fogle is a freelance writer and photographer who is passionate about gardening and dogs. She can be reached at her website, www.jeanmfogle.com Fresh-cut, home-grown flowers transform a house into a home! Cutting armfuls of flowers you grew, and then making arrangements, drying them or giving them away is a true country pleasure. For years, I resisted harvesting flowers from my gardens, afraid I would ruin the wonderful display. The perfect solution was to start a cutting garden.

© jeanmfogle.com This new garden was fun to plan. I had no reason to worry about the design; I simply planted the flowers in rows for easy plant care and harvest. I didn't need to worry about color schemes; I could welcome flowers of all colors. Now, spring, summer and fall, I can cut to my heart's content! If you love flowers in your home, try adding a cutting garden.

Where you plan your cutting garden will determine the plants you will be able to use. Check the location to see how much sunlight it receives during the day. If it is sunny in the morning but shady by noon, all but the deepest shade plants will thrive. Hot afternoon sun locations are best for the sun-loving plants. Note if the area holds water or if it drains quickly.

Annuals

Annuals only grace your garden for one year. Making up for their lack of longevity is the long bloom period, often from spring till the first frost of fall. Many gardeners use annuals to fill in the cutting garden until their perennials mature. Other gardeners use only annuals for their cutting gardens. No matter how you use them, annuals will increase your colorful cutting flowers. Try these floriferous annuals for plentiful blooms. Snapdragons Zinnias Cleome Annual Rudbeckia Cosmos Salvia Larkspur Stock Perennials form the backbone of any cutting garden. The plants live and bloom for years but their blooming season is often counted in weeks instead of months. When you begin to plan your garden, don't forget to check when the plants bloom. Be sure to add spring, summer and fall bloomers to your cutting garden. By staggering the bloom time, you will have plenty of flowers to grace your home.

Spring Color for Cutting

When the snow recedes and the warm winds begin to blow, the spring bloomers brighten the grey landscape. Be sure to plant enough spring flowers to add some cheer to the cool spring days. Early bird bloomers have the shortest bloom times. (Find plant hardiness zone information at: <http://vegsource.com/gardening/> or www.usna.usda.gov/Hardzone/ushzmap.html) Lenten Rose (Hellebores) - Often blooming while snow still covers the ground, this tough and tenacious perennial has wonderful flowers. Flowers can be single or double, and come in a large variety of colors including green. Plant these shade lovers in well drained locations for years of blooms. Harvest the flowers when they are just opening. Zones 4 to 9

Columbine (Aquilegia) - From April to June, columbines add their special beauty to the garden. The petals have spurs that project behind the flower which gives them an unusual look. For areas of the garden where you need some height, the McKanna's Giants reach 36 inches and come in a wide array of colors. I love the long strong stem of these for cutting. For a more compact plant, look for the dwarf Dragonfly Hybrids; they only grow 16 inches. In cooler climates the plants can tolerate sun, but require shade in warmer climates, and enjoy rich well drained soils. Cut when the blooms just begin to open. Zones 3-9

Dianthus - From lowly groundcovers to the taller varieties, dianthus performs well in almost any garden. One whiff of the spicy fragrance and you can understand why the flower is popular in cut arrangements. Dianthus do best in full sun and come in colors ranging from pure white to purple. The lovely grey green foliage makes a nice contrast to the flowers. When the flowers first open is the best time to harvest. Zones 3-8

Bleeding Hearts (Dicentra) - Bleeding hearts flowers are always a welcome sight. The stems with dainty

© Nance Photography hearts delicately dangling in a row make great cut flowers and add a special touch to any arrangement. The common bleeding heart had dark pink flowers and grows to 36 inches. These plants enjoy shady locations with rich moist soil. If you have a sunnier spot, try *Dicentra eximia* commonly called Fringed Bleeding heart. More compact growing only 10"-18", this plant blooms for longer periods of time than common bleeding heart and tolerates some sun. Both types of bleeding hearts are available in white cultivars. Cut bleeding hearts for arrangements when the flowers are open. Zones 4-8

Peonies - What would spring be like without fragrant peony flowers? Though their blooming season is short, the big beautiful flowers are a must for any cutting garden. Hardy and easy to grow, peonies enjoy full sun sites, but can tolerate some shade. The colors range from white to red with a few yellow varieties. The double flowers tend to be the most fragrant, but single flowers have a lovely form. Cut these flowers when they are just opening. Zones 2-8

Oriental poppy (*Papaver*) - Late spring brings the incredibly showy flowers of the oriental poppy. Brilliant

Extra Bounty

Once your cutting garden is established, you might have more flowers than you can use.

Extra flowers can be dried for later use, or even sold at a roadside stand. Sharing the bounty is a great way to brighten the lives of others.

For over 15 years Susan Brown had grown cut flowers. She has always grown enough to share with her neighbors and found it a great way to make friends. When Brown started doing volunteer work with hospice, she discovered a whole new use for her flowers.

She started taking flowers when she volunteered. Nurses and patients alike looked forward to visits from the 'flower lady'. "To see something colorful and beautiful from nature in the confines of a room you rarely leave is more powerful than many of us can imagine. For me, the reward of growing cutting flowers is being able to share their beauty and the joy they create with so many others. Most cutting flowers are perfect to share abundantly because, in most cases, the more you cut, the more they respond with additional flowers.

There is a lesson here, the more we share, the more there is to share!" says Brown. colors of the large crepe paper like flowers make these plants a must for a cutting garden. They love full sun and well- drained soil but only bloom a few short weeks. Cut the flowers in the cool morning before the flowers fully open. Zones 3-7

Lupine – Lupine's long spikes of pea-like flowers are held above the plant's attractive foliage. The flowers come in many colors, including some bi-colors. Lupine grows best in acid soil and likes a shady spot in the garden. Harvest when most of the buds are open. Zones 4-8 Summer Color

As the warmer weather of summer approaches, the spring bloomers slip away, replaced by the incredible array of summer bloomers.

Just a few of the many to choose from, these are plants that are hardy in most gardens and have a longer bloom time than many summer perennials.

Shasta daisy (*Leucanthemum*) - White daisies compliment any flower arrangement and the perennial Shasta daisies are great bloomers. While most shastas have a short bloom period, 'Becky' blooms till frost. This tough plant fills out quickly and produces masses of flowers, making it my all time favorite daisy. As a cut flower it is excellent due to its sturdy stem that holds up well in arrangements. Plant in full sun, and be prepared to share this plant with friends since the clumps will grow quickly. Cut the flowers when they are fully open. Zones 4-9

Delphinium - The tall stately beauties of the cutting garden, these plants produce masses of flowers. Strong stems make them great cut flowers in arrangements. "Pacific Giants" come in a variety of colors, are mildew resistant and grow around 4 feet tall. Look for 'Magic Fountains' if you need a shorter plant. Known best for brilliant blue flowers, they also come in pink, red and white. Plant in full sun and well-drained soil for the best results. Harvest when half of the florets are open. Zones 4-8

Coneflowers (*Echinacea*) – Native to the North American plains, coneflowers have lovely flowers with drooping petals. These hardy, adaptable plants produce excellent cut flowers and deserve a place in any cutting garden. The standard coneflower has bright pink flowers, but 'White Swan' is an excellent cultivar with white flowers. Exciting new coneflower varieties now come in shades of mango, orange and gold. Look for 'Sunrise', 'Sunset', and 'Sunset' if you want these colors in your garden. Coneflowers tolerate many different conditions but do enjoy a fair amount of sun, and can be cut at any time. At the end of the season, don't remove the spent flowers, the birds love the seeds. Zones 2-8

Phlox – If fragrance is a must in your garden, be sure to plant phlox! Ranging from white to purple, you are sure to find a phlox that fits your garden needs. Look for varieties resistant to powdery mildew, a common problem of this plant. ‘David’, has wonderful white flowers and is very disease resistant. ‘Robert Poore’ has rosy purple flowers with strong stems for cutting. Lovely lilac blooms and sweet scent make ‘Franz Schubert’ one of my favorite phlox. When half of the flowers are open is the best time to cut to take in for arrangements. Zones 4-8

Russian Sage (Perovskia) – This plant packs a punch! The silvery green foliage contrasts nicely with the lovely spikes of lavender blue flowers and an added bonus is the herb like fragrance of the plant. Russian sage blooms till frost and produces plenty of flowers. Plant size reaches four to five feet tall by three to four feet wide, with an open airy look. Tolerant of poor soil, drought and a range of pH, Russian Sage can grow in a variety of conditions. This plant deserves a sunny place in any cutting garden. Cut when most of the flowers are open. Zones 3-9

Coreopsis- For your garden border, try coreopsis. Growing from 8 inches to 2 feet, these sun loving plants produce flowers for a long period of time. Thread leaf coreopsis, has fern like foliage and blooms profusely. The yellow, pink or red flowers are small but the foliage adds a nice texture to an arrangement. Taller growing ‘Early Sunrise’ has large, bright yellow semi-double flowers and is one of my favorite coreopsis. Harvest when the flowers are open. Zones 4-9

Blanket flower (Gaillardia) – Easy to grow Blanket flower is a lovely addition to the cutting garden. The daisy like flowers have yellow tips and rust centers and a long bloom time. For dwarf plants look for ‘Goblin’ and ‘Baby Cole’. ‘Burgundy’ is taller and has solid red flowers while ‘Dazzler’ had the bicolor red and yellow flowers. ‘Red Plume’ has a dark red, double flower. Plant them in full sun and well drained soil then sit back and enjoy. Cut the flowers when they are fully open. Zones 2-10

Fall Bloomers

When cool weather arrives, the summer perennials decide they are done, and the fall bloomers begin their show.

Sneezeweed (Helenium) - Once used in place of snuff to induce sneezing, this wildflower is finding a home in the fall garden. The yellow, orange or red daisylike flowers open in late summer and the plant grows 3 to 5 feet.. This plant is excellent if you have clay soil and enjoys a sunny spot. Cut when the flowers just open. Zones 3-9

Goldenrod (Solidago) - Since ragweed and goldenrod bloom at the same time, goldenrod has long been wrongly blamed for causing hay fever. This incredible plant is finally getting the respect it deserves in the fall garden. Unlike native goldenrods, the new varieties are more compact and less invasive. ‘Fireworks’ grows three feet and blooms vigorously till frost. ‘Golden Fleece’ is a more compact variety that grows about 18 inches tall. Give goldenrod plenty of sun and once they are established, they are tolerant of drought. Cut these flowers when some of the florets are just opening. Zones 2-9

Asters - In shades of pink, red, purple, blue and white, these delicate daisy-like blossoms add punch to the autumn garden. There is an abundance of varieties available, with dwarf plants and ones that grow 3-5 feet. I particularly love the dark purple of the ‘Purple Dome’ and the brilliant red of ‘Winston Churchill’. The airy foliage is a nice contrast to the flowers and helps fill in fall bouquets. Give them a sunny site and enjoy the show. Cut the flowers when most of the flowers are open. Zones 4- 9

Turtle head (Chelone) - Don’t let the name of this perennial put you off! Nick-named for blossoms shaped like turtles heads, this plant adds a lot of interest to the fall garden. Coming in shades of white, pink or red, turtle head has attractive foliage and generally, the plant is 3 feet tall and 2 feet wide. Partial shade to full sun and a consistently moist to wet, organic soil are ideal conditions for growth. Cut the flowers when they are just opening. Zones 2-9

Toad Lily (Tricyrtis) - Here is another lovely plant with a less than desirable name. The speckled pink flowers look like orchids and rise above lovely foliage. New varieties include those with variegated foliage and a few even have yellow flowers. ‘Miyazaki’ and ‘Amethystina’ are nice varieties. Plant toad lilies in moist but well-drained soil in part to full shade. To bring the flowers in for arrangements, pick when buds show color and are just beginning to open. Zones 4-9

Japanese Anemone – Tall and stately, the anemones add pink or white flowers to the fall garden. An excellent selection is ‘Honorine Joubert’. This vigorous plant grows up to five feet and produces masses of single white flowers. ‘Max Vogel’ is another tall plant with single pink flowers. Where you need a shorter plant, look for ‘Prince Henry’. It only reaches two feet and had semi-double flowers that are rosy pink. Japanese anemones need well draining soil and shade. Cut the flowers as the buds open. Zones 5-8

Sedum (Stonecrop) – Sedum makes a great cutting garden plant. It requires minimal attention and is drought tolerant. 'Autumn Joy' is the traditional variety but newer varieties such as 'Bertram Anderson', 'Brilliant' and 'Matrona' are excellent choices. Give sedum full sun and well drained soil and sit back and enjoy the show. Cut when most of the florets are open. Zones 3 – 9

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