Planting and Maintaining a Cut Flower Garden at Home

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www.mercer.njaes.rutgers.edu
Flowering Plants in the Landscape

Cut flower gardens

- Plant in rows with walking paths for harvesting ease
- Choose plants based on desired arrangements, styles, scents, color schemes
- Look for long, sturdy stems and high production

Annuals (tender and hardy)

- Flower, set seed, and die in one growing season
- Bloom over long period
- Often used to add bursts of color to gardens
Biennials

- Vegetative growth in first year, flower and set seed in second year
- Require cold stratification if sown in spring

Canterbury bells
Campanula medium

Foxglove
Digitalis

Perennials

- Roots live, stems die
- Less labor-intensive
- Reproduce by seed, divisions, cuttings
- Shorter bloom period

Columbine
Aquilegia
Cardinal flower
Lobelia cardinalis

Flowering vines

- Vigorous growers
- Often require winter pruning
- Interesting tendrils and foliage for arrangements

Clematis
Clematis florida
Trumpet vine
Campsis radicans

Flowering trees and shrubs

- Pruning needs and maintenance depend on species
- Flowers, foliage, and fruit for arrangements
- Upfront investment, longer to maturity

Arrowwood viburnum
Viburnum dentatum
Crabapple
Malus species
Cardinal flower
Lobelia cardinalis
**Spring-flowering bulbs**

- Food storage structure underground

- **Bulbs** (tulips), **corms** (crocus), **tubers** (dahlia), **rhizomes** (lily-of-the-valley), **tuberous roots** (ranunculus)

- Bloom year after year with proper care

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**Garden Preparation and Seed Starting**

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**Planting and soil conditions**

- Full sun
- Low wind
- Low perennial weed pressure
- Fertile, well-drained soil
- pH of 6.2 – 6.5

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**Assessing light conditions**

- **Full sun** = >6 hours direct sunlight per day
- **Partial sun** = 4 to 6 hours
- **Partial shade** = 2 to 4 hours
- **Shade** = <2 hours
Soil testing

Address poor drainage

Soil conditions

- Soil aggregates: soil particles that bind together
- Working soil too often or when too wet can damage soil structure

Starting seeds indoors

- Soilless potting mix
- Seedling trays or pots with drainage holes
- Time seeding with frost-free date or planting date in mind
- Cover seed lightly with soil, keep warm and moist, plastic covering

http://www.njaes.rutgers.edu/soil-testing-lab/
Transplants

- Two true leaves
- Harden off 2 weeks before planting
- Water within an hour of planting
- Mindful of spacing

Direct sowing

- Read seed packet!
- When to sow, seed depth and spacing, days to emergence
- Special germination instructions
- Check the date on old seed packets
Cold stratification

- Cold required to break seed dormancy
- Sow in fall for spring germination – risk natural elements
- Stratification: place seeds in plastic bag with moist paper towel, sphagnum moss, sand for 4 weeks

Columbine Aquilegia Black-eyed Susan Rudbeckia hirta

Maintenance and Care

Watering

- 1 inch per week
- Deep, infrequent watering
- Morning or early afternoon
- Soaker hose, mulch

Mechanical weed management
Physical barriers and mulches

- **Organic mulches**: grass clippings, straw, leaves, bark, newspaper, brown paper mulch
- **Synthetic mulches**: black plastic, landscape fabric

Pinching back

- When 4 sets of leaves, remove upper most growth at node
- Create bushier plants
- More flowering stems
- Greater floral production

Deadheading

- Cut below spent flower, above healthy leaves
- Longer bloom period

Ongoing care

- Thinning
- Weeding
- Trellising and staking
- Fertilizing
- Dividing perennials
Preventing deer damage

- Damage appears as torn vegetation with jagged edge
- Avoid preferred species (tulips, daylily)
- Apply taste-based or odor-based repellants
- Use exclusion fencing

Managing diseases and pests

- Purchase high-quality, disease-free plants
- Check for obvious insect issues at point of purchase
- Choose disease and pest-resistant varieties
- Remove and destroy sickly plants from garden as soon as possible

Aster yellows on Echinacea

https://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.php?pid=E014
Choosing Plants

**High producers**
- Zinnia
- Cosmos
- Rudbeckia
- Gomphrena

**Medium producers**
- Snapdragon
- Antirrhinum
- Sunflower
- Helianthus
- Love-lies-bleeding
- Amaranthus

**Foliage plants and grasses**
- Bells of Ireland
- Molucella laevis
- Eucalyptus
- Panicum elegans
**Filler flowers**

- Statice
- Limonium
- Celosia
- Yarrow
- Achillea millefolium

**Other considerations**

- Succession planting of annuals (group early, mid-, and late-season flowers grouped together)
- Plant taller flowers where they won’t shade out shorter ones
- Experiment with spacing

**Flower harvest and vase life**

- Harvest using sharp, clean tools
- Timing depends on species
- Long stems for vases, strip foliage
- Tepid water, floral preservative

**Cut flower garden resources**

- *Cut Flowers for the Market and Home Garden*, Rutgers Cooperative Extension
- *Creating a Cutting Garden*, PennState Extension
- *Top-Rated Garden Flowers for Cutting*, Michigan State University Extension
- *Field Grown Annuals for Cut Flowers*, University of Massachusetts Extension
Digital Tools and Resources

gardening.cornell.edu/homegardening

Cut flower garden resources

gardening.cornell.edu/homegardening

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