

Newbie offers plant suggestions to grow cut flowers

Acres of cut flowers.

Rows upon rows of finely groomed, blooming beauty.

Growing cut flowers is certainly all the rage right now. As a dreamer, thinking of all this wonderful abundance is lovely! However, we live in Wyoming, and where one lives determines what can be grown. Some parts of the state have bigger challenges than others when growing quality flowers. Weather – short growing seasons, excessive wind, hail storms, and other events – can make things particularly challenging, especially if the flowers are not grown under protection.

For perennial flowers, knowing the USDA plant hardiness zone will help growers select plants more likely to thrive in their area. I grow cut flowers near Buffalo, which is a zone 4b-5a; however, Wyoming's growing zones range from 3-6 (per the USDA plant hardiness zone chart) and to provide information that can be used by most, I am basing this article on USDA Zone 4. See bit.ly/hardizones to find your zone.

Start small and experiment to see what will work for you. Start growing them for your own use and enjoyment before deciding to dive into a money-generating adventure

(and get out a calculator to crunch some numbers to see if the economics will work for you – you may find turning a profit challenging in this area.)

Flowers that do well in northeast Wyoming

The list of flowers that do well in northeast Wyoming is long. Here are some flowers that, as a newbie, I've found particularly successful.

Sunflowers, specifically the Procut variety. They do not produce the pollen good, old-fashioned sunflowers do, so they won't leave a huge mess in a bouquet.

Scabiosa, aka pincushion flower, is a fast-growing, long-lasting cut flower. They are also very attractive to pollinators. Bees love them!

Cosmos, zinnias, bells of Ireland, Centaurea (bachelor's button), **calendula, celosia,** and **poppies** are also great flowers to start from seeds. I have had great success planting these directly in my garden. **Sweet pea** is my favorite easy grower. Given a trellis, some cool weather, and a little love, these produce the sweetest fragrance in the garden. They also last a very long time after being cut.

With a little more effort, **tulips** and **daffodils** can be rewarding.

Cut sunflowers and business sense

University of Wyoming Extension horticulture specialist Karen Panter has experimented with various kinds of cut flower production over the years. Check out her publication *A Wyoming Growers' Reference Guide to Cut Sunflowers* at bit.ly/cutsunflowers.

If considering a new business venture, check out the Barnyards & Backyards "Business" page at bit.ly/wyobusinessinfo.

Just be mindful they need a cooling period to grow and bloom in early spring. This cooling process is known as vernalization and even can be done inside. A good refrigerator can do the trick. I learned this last year since I hadn't planned ahead; however, bulbs do require more work as a cut flower rather than just a perennial. These flowers need to be pulled, bulb and all, and placed in cold storage. Cut them from the bulb just before putting them into a bouquet.

Lilies are pretty resilient to our weather here as well. They do

perennialize (come back year after year); however, they need to be dug and divided every few years to keep them blooming.

Dahlias are a flower that does well in Zone 4 but require more work and love than other flowers. They need to be planted every season and dug every fall and stored at the correct humidity level. The blossoms of the dinner plate-sized varieties also need to be covered with organza bags to keep the shape uniform and to keep the Japanese beetle from attacking. The beetles love the blooms and will attack the buds, so cover them as soon as possible.

A couple of other flowers do well here, too, but seeing them bloom takes time. **Iris**es are beautiful. They bloom early summer and can have an enticing fragrance often, but it takes two seasons before they bloom. **Peonies** are another favorite for many growers, but it will be three to five years before you will get any blooms. Again, time and effort!

Cherry, lilac, plums and crabapples

Shrubs and trees offer flowers in the spring. **Cherry blossoms** are so beautiful and when put into a white pitcher with room temperature water, they will last a few weeks.

Lilacs are always a huge hit with anyone who enjoys their fragrance.

Plum and **crabapple** blossoms also do amazingly well as cut stems.

Finally, make sure to check your local patch. **Bee balm** and **cress** show up in many bouquets these days, and picking these is so much cheaper and easier than growing them.

Cut flowers can really brighten your day and that of others in a community. My newbie advice to any prospective cut flower grower is to dream and start small. This is a fantastic dream and awesome reality **IF** you do your research **AND** work your tail off. Begin your endeavor with plenty of researching and experimenting, and the odds of your venture blooming, for your own or others' enjoyment, will increase.

We hope **Amanda Hulet** at this very moment has fresh cut flowers adorning her desk. She is the district clerk at Clear Creek Conservation District in Buffalo. She can be reached at (307) 684-2526, extension 3002, or at amanda.hulet@clearcreekcd.org.

