



A guide to growing

Life is too short to not stop and smell the flowers.

In order to have plenty of

flowers to smell, you might want to plant some in your garden, even if the main purpose of the garden is to grow food for the family. Over the years *Barnyards & Backyards* has published several articles about planting for pollinators, but planting for *us* is beneficial too. Yards full of color brighten our days and bring beautiful creatures like birds and insects to our gardens. Cut flowers, in particular, give us opportunities to share floral gifts with our friends, family, neighbors, and co-workers—which in return fills us with joy and gratitude.

Last summer I brought sunflowers to work regularly. Once the office was inundated, I took flowers to a local campground near our home. The reception was much more enthusiastic than I anticipated. Everyone enjoyed the flowers and remarked that they looked forward to seeing the different colors and flower sizes over the season.

Gardeners across the state may also choose to grow cut flowers to share a piece of a family legacy. As a child, I picked sweet peas with my grandmother in the early weeks of summer. I have long enjoyed sweet pea bouquets in small vases: not only are the flowers beautifully delicate, but they also add their sweet fragrance to the whole room.

Long-lasting flowers

Several plants that will provide flowers over a long growing season are zinnias, cosmos, dahlias, phlox, scabiosa, and sweet pea. These flowers can be cut multiple times in the same growing season. Some filler flowers can also be grown for continuous cutting and filling multiple bouquets. These cut-and-come-again fillers are gomphrena, statice, and strawflower. These three are also known as everlasting flowers as they can be cut and dried to use for displays that last long after the garden has frozen and flowers are only a winter's dream.

Early bloomers

If you plant enough daffodils, fritillaria, hyacinth, and tulips around the garden, you can begin cutting flowers while you wait for

snow to melt and spring planting to arrive. Not long after the spring bulbs put on their show, peonies blossom. To enjoy their blooms later, they can be cut, wrapped tightly in paper, and stored in the refrigerator crisper for up to a month. This saves their big, beautiful cotton candy blossoms for later enjoyment in vases or handheld bouquets. In fact, the refrigerator can be used as a tool to prolong the bloom time on many spring bulbs as well.

Other flowers that grow in the early part of the growing season and can be enjoyed into summer are larkspur, which is poisonous to livestock; bells of Ireland; calendula; snapdragons; cup and saucers; foxglove; celosia, or cockscomb; amaranth; and love-in-a-mist. These early bloomers offer a wide variety of shapes and colors in the garden and in bouquets of cut flowers.

Other favorites

In addition to the typical spring-blooming bulbs, lilies (toxic to cats), iris, and gladiolus add quite a dramatic statement to the garden. Lilies are some of my favorites to add to bouquets. Oriental lilies are very fragrant and can fill a home with their scent.

cut flowers in Wyoming

Gladiolus grow from a corm instead of a true bulb. The corms can be dug annually in the fall and stored to replant in the spring as they are not perennials in our climate. I pick up new colors every so often and enjoy saving the little cormlets (mini corms produced off the original corm) to replant until they mature to the point of producing one precious stalk.

Carnations are more traditional cut flowers that do well in our short growing season and should come back year after year. If you can give them some winter protection, they will start greening up and blooming early in summer. Dianthus are in the same family and make great cold-hardy filler flowers as well.

Rudbekia, or black-eyed Susans, are great cut flowers that also attract pollinators. Any fan of the Wyoming Cowboys is likely a fan of the flowers that gave UW its school colors. They work well with sunflowers in late-season bouquets.

Multi-purpose flowers

Lavender is another flower I have added in several locations in our garden. Not only is it a great cut flower, but it also has a wonderful scent and can be used as an herb. Lavender appreciates

a warm microclimate in the garden and may not be hardy in many areas of the state.

Interestingly, a vegetable from the garden—asparagus—can also provide much of the greenery needed for a bouquet. Once mature, it produces wonderful edible shoots. After harvesting ceases, the stalks produce flowers and seeds, resulting in beautiful feathery foliage called asparagus ferns. They are beautiful additions to any bouquet. Leave enough ferns uncut so that plants can photosynthesize and bulk up their roots for next year.

Many combinations of flowers can add colors, interesting textures, and even decadent scents to your garden from early spring to late fall. Your friends and family will be glad you made the additions! Everyone will benefit from the challenges you take on in your garden.

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Donna Hoffman is the horticulture educator in Natrona County and was a florist earlier in life. As a gardener, she cultivates an ever-growing palette of flowers to make bouquets for others to enjoy. If you have questions relating to cut flowers or other horticulture topics, contact her at (307) 235-9400 or dhoffman@natronacounty-wy.gov.

Thrillers, spillers, fillers & pillars

These four categories of cut flowers are key ingredients in a beautiful bouquet. Try growing some of each in your garden this year.

Thrillers: Large focal flowers such as sunflowers, larger zinnias, dahlias, daffodils, fritillaria, hyacinth, tulips, peonies, lilies, iris, carnations, and black-eyed Susans.

Spillers: Flowers that cascade over the edge of the display, including smaller sunflowers with curved stems, sweet peas, amaranth, and kisses over the garden gate.

Fillers: Fluffy little flowers to fill in the bouquet. Examples include smaller zinnias, cosmos, phlox, scabiosa, gomphrena, statice, strawflower, love-in-a-mist, dianthus, and lavender.

Pillars: These spike-shaped flowers, including larkspur, bells of Ireland, foxglove, snapdragon, liatris, tall amaranth, celosia, and gladiolus, add a dramatic flair.