

Creating a Cutting Garden



For gardeners, the ultimate pleasure is to be able to cut flowers from their own garden to bring indoors and to give away to friends and family. Many also love to have homegrown blossoms, foliage, and seed heads handy for fresh or dried floral crafts and cooking. However, the problem is always that picking flowers from the garden reduces the floral show in the yard. The perfect solution is to establish a separate cultivated area specifically as a cutting garden. This does not have to have design correctness since its function is to be cut down.

Create a cutting garden much the same way you initially establish a flower garden. Choose a site that receives generous sun and prepare the soil so it drains well. Add humus in the form of compost, peat moss, or chopped leaves to improve clay or sandy soil. Create one or more beds of whatever size and shape accommodate the available space. They can be tucked into sunny spots along the back boundary, in a neglected corner, or behind the garage. By their very nature, they are transient, so they are easily changed or reconfigured next season if necessary.

While cutting gardens often look beautiful at the peak of the season, this is incidental. Because they are not intended for display, a purely utilitarian layout makes the most sense. Then once they are established they are easier to maintain and require much less attention than ornamental beds do. For this reason, cutting gardens usually resemble traditional vegetable gardens. They are typically planted in widely spaced rows that are easy to move through and between while planting, thinning, fertilizing, deadheading, and, of course, harvesting.

Be sure and mix into the soil a granular, slow-acting fertilizer at the beginning of the season. This will provide consistent, balanced nutrition to the plants over many, many weeks. Periodic doses of dilute liquid fertilizer sprayed on plant foliage will boost the energy of certain heavy blooming plants during peak production.

Rather than inter-plant seeds or young transplants of many different kinds of flowers, group the species of plants for efficient use of space and easy harvest. To get maximum production, plant annuals in succession—early season, mid-season, and late season bloomers grouped together. Cluster plants with similar requirements for sun, water, and drainage for easier maintenance. Plant tall types together, away from where they might shade shorter types.

To minimize watering and weeding maintenance, spread a 2-3" layer of organic mulch on the soil around the plants in the cutting garden as soon as they are a few inches tall. It does not have to be attractive, so use whatever is inexpensive and at hand, such as chopped leaves, shredded newspaper, or straw. The mulch will discourage weeds, keep the soil moist longer,

and contribute nutrients to the soil as it decomposes in the heat of summer. Add to the mulch layer if it breaks down to less than an inch.

To spur and maintain flower production of annuals, pick blossoms regularly. Deadhead those that remain and become faded. This prevents them from forming seeds which slows flower production. Water about an inch per week if rainfall is unreliable. Un-mulched beds will need more frequent watering, especially in the summer.

Recommendations

Perennial Flowers

Achillea
Asclepias (tall varieties)
Asters
Chrysanthemum
Coreopsis (tall varieties)
Echinacea
Echinops (Globe Thistle)
Goldenrod
Gypsophila
Helianthus
Iris
Lavender
Leucanthemum
Liatris
Lilac
Lilium
Monarda (tall varieties)
Paeonia
Penstemon
Phlox (summer blooming)
Roses
Rudbeckia

Annual Flowers

Cleome
Cosmos
Sunflower
Zinnia

Bulbs

Allium
Daffodils
Dahlias
Gladiolas
Tulips

Shrubs and Trees

Beauty Bush
Buddleia
Corylus contorta
Holly
Hydrangeas
Magnolia branches (spring blooming trees)
Viburnum
Winterberry Holly

Foliage

Asparagus fern
Canna
Coleus
Dusty Miller
Eucalyptus
Ferns (tall varieties)
Ornamental grasses