

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



March 18, 2023

Easy to Grow Flowers for Fresh Table Arrangements

When I wanted to add plants to my mother's garden, there was one requirement. The flowers or leaves of the plant had to be suitable for use in a fresh-cut flower arrangement. My mother keeps a fresh floral arrangement from the garden on the kitchen table from the first flowers in late winter to the last flowers before the killing frost. It only takes planting seeds of a variety of easy-to-grow flowering annuals to have a weekly bouquet of fresh flowers for your table. The following plants grow best in well-drained soil and full sun.

Zinnias (*Zinnia elegans*) provide many round flower heads which range in size from 1.5 to 6 inches across. 'Cut and Come Again' and 'Oklahoma' have small flowers which are great to use as fillers. 'State Fair' and 'Giant Cactus' have large flowers which serve as focal points in an arrangement. The flower colors range from tints and tones of red, scarlet, pink, yellow, chartreuse, coral, salmon, and orange. White zinnias blend well with other colors. Bicolor flowers are also available. 'Peppermint Stick' has red streaks on the petals. Petal shapes also differ. For example, the cactus flowered varieties have quilled petals.

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To have zinnias throughout the season, stagger several plantings. After the plants begin to look old and tired, remove them. New flowers start to bloom on the next planting.

Sunflowers (*Helianthus annuus*) always bring a smile. Colors include yellow, golden yellow, light yellow, red, and bronze. The flower size of 4 to 8 inches across can be found, and plant height from 4 to 8 feet, depending on the cultivar. Well-branched plants help to supply flowers for several weeks.

Pollenless sunflowers are not as messy. ‘Double Dandy’, with its double red flowers, and ‘Teddy Bear’, with fully double yellow flowers, are pollen-free. ‘Sunbright’ has a golden yellow, 4-inch, pollenless flower.

The upright, spike-shaped flowers of the plume or feathery celosia (*Celosia argentea plumosa*) add height and another shape to an arrangement. Flower colors include cream, orange, red, and yellow. The plumes can reach up to 13 inches long. ‘Celosia Fresh Look’ is available with red or yellow flowers. ‘Asian Garden’ celosia’s bright pink spikes add height to an arrangement and works as a filler. Celosia is easy to grow from seed and takes little care.

Global amaranth (*Gomphrena*) has a spectacular flower that can be used fresh or dried. The 1- to 1.5-inch, globe-shaped flowers are nice accents and fillers in an arrangement. Many branches are formed on the plant, so the flowers may be arranged in groups. The flower colors include purple, pink, white, red and white, and rose bicolor.

The plant height of globe amaranth varies from 18 to 32 inches tall, depending on the cultivar. The plants will bloom in the heat and through drought conditions.

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Lace cosmos (*Cosmos bipinnatus*) flowers are simple and pretty with yellow centers. The blossoms are 2 to 3 inches wide. Flower color varies with the cultivar but may include white, pink, carmine, and rose-red. Some cultivars are bicolor with magenta and white. Cultivars are also available with many rows of petals called double and semi-double blossoms.

The lace cosmos has very fine narrow leaves. The plants may reach 18 inches to 3 feet tall. This species produces long stems which make the flower easier to use in arrangements. The cosmos plant will bloom all season long.

Snapdragon (*Antirrhinum majus*) has a tall spike filled with little 1 to 2-inch flowers that children like to hold on the sides and squeeze together to make them snap or open and close. The flower colors include red, pink, rose, scarlet, yellow, orange, violet, purple, orchid, and white.

Plant height of snapdragon ranges from 8 to 30 inches tall including the flower spike. The taller cultivars will need staking to hold the flower spikes up. Snapdragon is a cool season flower so look for heat-tolerant cultivars. Otherwise, grow them in the early spring or start in August for fall flowering.

Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*) is an annual with 2- to 4-inch wide flowers. The center is usually brown or black, except for the cultivars like 'Prairie Sun' and 'Irish Spring', which have a green center. Petal colors range from yellow or gold to orange, and may also be bi-colored with mahogany. 'Indian Summer' has beautiful 6-inch wide flowers and plants reach 24 to 36 inches tall.

Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*), used as a filler, adds color if using a cultivar like 'Purple Ruffles'. The leaves are dark purple. The pink flowers can be used, but the foliage is the main

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reason to use this basil. The plant reaches 18 to 24 inches tall. Green basil can be used as well as a filler.

When arranging with cut flowers, remove excess foliage that may be submerged in water within the vase which will start to decay and start microbial growth in the vase. It is best to use a flower preservative in the water. This material provides food for the flowers and inhibits bacteria and fungi growth. Change the water frequently. Aspirin or copper pennies placed in the vase water do not extend the life of the flowers.

For more information about growing cut flowers, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at (270) 685-8480 or annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu.

Upcoming Events:

“What to Grow When” will be presented on February 21 at 2:00 p.m. at the Daviess County Public Library and live streamed at www.facebook.com/dcplibrary.

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