



The Gardener's Workshop

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1-888-977-7159

Growing Cut Flowers like the Pros!

With Lisa Ziegler

Having an easy-keeper cutting garden in your yard isn't an impossible dream. Follow a few of my simple ground rules and you will be on your way to a season of beautiful homegrown bouquets!

1. **Location:** Your bed should be located in 6-8 hours of sun. Start small; a bed 3' x 10' will produce enough flowers all season for you and a friend when harvested weekly.
2. **It's in the soil!** The secret to guaranteed success with cut flowers is the soil, or shall I say how you prepare and feed the soil. Spend more time preparing the soil and adding organic matter than you think you should. Opening the soil and adding organic matter allows air, water, worms, and roots to roam freely in your bed- exactly what you want. Add dry organic fertilizer when preparing the soil, according to instructions. With each new seasonal planting add more organic matter. Note: *never step on the bed after it has been prepared!*
3. **Grow "cut flower" variety plants.** This lends another hand to easy success. Annual cut flower variety flowers produce non-stop all season when harvested weekly. These are the workhorses and favorites of our own gardens: Benary's Giant Zinnias, Celosias Pampas Plumes and Cockscombs, Sunbright and Sunbeam Sunflowers and Mrs. Burn's Lemon Basil. All of these selections dig in their heels during drought and heat and shine like super stars!
4. **Finishing touches for lower maintenance.** When using plants, mulch the bed immediately after planting to prevent weeds from sprouting. When planting seeds, wait until they have sprouted and are over 6-8" tall before mulching. Our foolproof insurance policy: cover both seeds and plants immediately after planting with a floating row cover. Keeping the cover over seeds and plants for 10-14 days will protect them from drying winds, hot sun, hungry rabbits and squirrels with treasures to bury. The garden will be off to a great start! Keep your bed well watered until established (a week or two for transplants and a little longer for seeds). Then wait for the show to begin! Support netting is beneficial, easy to install and will keep your flowers standing tall during downpours and rough winds.

If the bed is prepared, fed and planted as recommended, you are on your way to a season of literally oodles of flowers with little to no maintenance.

5. **The golden ground rule:** Now you must treat your flowerbed like a cutting garden! That means to harvest every week without fail even if you don't need flowers. The first time you skip cutting your flowers marks the beginning of the end of your cutting garden. Cutting on a regular schedule keeps your bed in tip-top shape and keeps your plants constantly producing new flowers, the essential to a great cutting garden!
6. **Harvesting Tips:**
 - When going to the garden to harvest, take a clean plastic container filled with a mixture of water and floral preservative.
 - Harvest in the morning after the dew has dried.
 - Use sharp by-pass shears for harvesting.
 - Make the cut at the base of the stem even if you only need a short flower. Where you make the cut dictates where the next stem grows from.
 - Allow flowers to recover from harvesting by sitting in a cool spot for a few hours before arranging.
 - The only foliage that should be left on a flower stem is that which contributes to the arrangement. All other foliage should be removed. This lightens the load on the stem, adding days of life to your flowers.
 - Floral preservative mixed according to directions does make a difference. It prevents the growth of things you don't want in the water and it feeds your flowers, extending their vase life.
 - Change out your water every few days if needed and trim the stems 1/2-1" each time.
 - Be sure to rustle your flowers up from time to time to get that fragrant lemon basil filling the house!

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