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Bouquets every day

A small flowerbed planted with bright and easy summer blooms produces splashy bouquets all season long, with plenty left to share.



A sprig of dill looks terrific in a bouquet with zinnias, celosia, and basil.



Suzanne Frye, right, is the bouquet expert and her sister, Lisa Ziegler, is the farmer at The Gardener's Workshop in Newport News, Virginia.

Lisa Ziegler and Suzanne

You don't have to own a farm to be a flower farmer. With a small, well-managed plot in your own backyard, you can grow a nonstop crop of colorful blooms and keep the house full of flowers all summer. Lisa Ziegler grows thousands of zinnias, sunflowers, and other terrific summer flowers on her ¼-acre cut-flower farm in Newport News, Virginia. She and her sister, Suzanne Frye, sell flowers by the stem or the bouquet at a local farmer's market and to customers who buy shares of the annual crop then stop by the Ziegler farm to pick up their harvest of

blooms every week. "Most people think they couldn't grow their own cut-flower garden, but that's a big misconception," Lisa says. "In a small space you can do a lot. You'll have more flowers than you know what to do with."

Lisa's cut-flower season starts in early spring with sweet peas, larkspur, love-in-a-mist, corn cockles (*Agrostemma*), poppies, and calendulas, all sown in the fall in her mild Zone 7 climate. By the time these cool-season plants have faded, her summer flowers are ready to harvest.



Opposite far left: Cut stems short for a bouquet in a bowl. Here are red and chartreuse zinnias, lime-green celosia, and lemon basil. *Opposite center:* Suzanne picked pink and yellow zinnias, a few feathery purple celosias, one sunflower, and a fistful of basil for an exuberant bouquet in a tall vase. *Opposite right:* A festive bouquet combines Benary's Giant zinnias and dark 'Blue Horizon' Ageratum, with a touch of basil for fragrance. *This page:* 'Purple Majesty' millet echoes the dark centers of a bunch of sunflowers.

Lisa depends especially on zinnias for summer color, and grows lots of other heat-loving flowers and herbs to complement them. One of her favorite fillers for summer bouquets is 'Mrs. Burns' lemon basil, which adds irresistible fragrance to a vase full of zinnias. Ageratums give Suzanne's bouquets a romantic touch of blue. Big 'Pro Cut' sunflowers stand tall in the garden or in a vase; they are among the earliest-blooming sunflowers, and they're known for their long-lasting flowers. Suzanne uses them in bouquets with zinnias, or with dramatic dark plumes of 'Purple Majesty' millet.

When Lisa first designed cutting gardens for home gardeners, she suggested planting two plots, each 3x10 feet. "It produced so many flowers, we knew nobody needed that much," she says. Now she recommends

one 3x10-foot flowerbed. Planting and harvesting it is a pleasure, not a chore. "You'll spend more time enjoying it than anything else," Lisa says.

To be successful, a backyard flower farm of annual flowers must be in full sun, it should be near a water source, and above all, it should not be part of the view from your kitchen or living-room windows, Lisa says. If you look at the garden all the time, you will not have the heart to cut your flowers every week.

Lisa is an organic gardener, and when she makes a new flowerbed, she turns lots of compost into the soil. She also mulches her flowerbeds with compost or straw, tucking it around the stems of plants. Lisa cuts her flowers early in the morning, when they are at their freshest, plunging the stems into clean plastic buckets filled with a gallon of water mixed with florist's flower



In a large vase, Suzanne uses chicken wire to support sunflower stems. She crumples the wire to fit in the vase and then threads sunflowers down through the holes, placing the tallest stems in the center. 'Purple Majesty' millet echoes the dark centers of the sunflowers and gives the bouquet an extravagant flourish.

Lisa planted the *Country Gardens* cutting garden in front of a shed in her backyard. The 3×10-foot design was divided into two 5-foot beds.



preservative. She's never alone among her flowers: She knows the robins well enough to name them, and watches bluebirds take insects to their young in nesting boxes around the garden. While the birds sing, she fills her buckets full of flowers and lets them rest in the shade in her flower barn. Lisa and Suzanne harvest flowers and make their bouquets twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays. To keep your cut-flower garden blooming all summer, it is important

to harvest flowers at least once a week. "Make it a schedule, make it a habit," Lisa says. "Stick to it."

A pretty bouquet on the kitchen table, in the front hall, on your desk, or by your bedside captures the essence of summer in a vase. Pick often and share generously, Lisa says. With a small bed of flowers growing outside your back door, the supply is abundant.

For more information, see the *Buyer's Guide* on page 102.

Country Gardens Seed Offer

Lisa Ziegler, a flower farmer and the owner of The Gardener's Workshop in Newport News, Virginia, has designed a colorful and easy cut-flower garden exclusively for *Country Garden* readers. Lisa has been a commercial cut-flower grower for 10 years, and the zinnias, sunflowers, celosia, and basil she has selected are her favorites for the bouquets she and her sister, Suzanne Frye, sell at farmer's markets. They are all sturdy, prolific, heat- and drought-tolerant plants. The seeds can be sown directly in the garden in spring after the danger of frost is past in your area. A 3×10-foot flower bed (see the plan, *opposite*) should produce several fresh bouquets each well all season.

Our exclusive collection contains five packages of seeds (2 mixes are exclusive to us), a planting diagram, Lisa's tips on reaping the best results and our BH&G No-Fail Best Ever Annuals 97-page gardening guide. \$27.95 plus shipping and handling.

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TGW Benary's Giant Zinnia Mix. Includes pink, crimson, lilac, yellow, and orange flowers. These 4- to 6-inch blossoms look smashing in single-color or mixed bouquets.



'Pro Cut' sunflowers These handsome plants stand 5 feet tall and should be placed at the back of the flower bed. They bloom about seven weeks after planting. The flowers produce no pollen, so they last longer than flowers that set seed. Each plant produces one, spectacular flower, so plant plenty of them.



TGW Celosia Premium Mix. Includes lime-green and hot-pink plumes. This is another of our in-house seed mixes of customer favorites and strong growers.



TGW Basil Bouquet Mix. A mix of lemon and cinnamon basil add fragrance and color. The lemon basil has soft, chartreuse foliage and white flowers; cinnamon basil has



Benary's Lime Green Zinnia. Lisa plants these at the front of the flower bed because they're not quite as tall as the mixed-color zinnias.