



Lisa Ziegler selects zinnias from her cutting garden in the Denbigh area of Newport News. PHOTOS BY DAVE BOWMAN/DAILY PRESS

Making the cuts

*Grow a flower shop in a small space in your backyard
and take your pick to create fresh arrangements*

Jack Frost is peeking around the corner but there's still time to harvest plenty of fresh-cut flowers from your garden.

You have no cutting garden?

Shame, shame: Lisa Ziegler wants your name so she can coach you on how easy it is to establish what she calls a flower shop in your backyard.

Ziegler says a simple cutting garden is made for the lazy gardener, the beginning gardener, the entertaining gardener, the brown-thumb gardener. Plant a few workhorse flowers like zinnias, sunflowers, poppies, celosia and marigolds and you'll have enough bouquets to fill the homes of everyone on your block.

A home gardener turned commercial grower, Ziegler plants only the toughest, longest-lasting flowers in plots around her home in the Denbigh area of Newport News. She's grown cut flowers for florists and for sale at area farmers' markets for years.

Here are some of her favorites, which are available in seed form from her online shop:

Name: Mrs. Burns lemon basil

Description: Use lemon basil stems as scented foliage in your fresh-cut bouquets, especially in the fall, when you strip the powdery mildew-infected leaves from flower stems you cut. Lemon basil stems last 10-14 days in a vase. The foliage is a nice lime-green color with a spike of white flowers. It provides a lemon fragrance that fills an entire room.

Name: Benary's Giants zinnia collection
includes scarlet red.

Name: Gold Coin marigolds are great traps for Japanese beetles.

Name: ProCut sunflower

Description: Fast-blooming sunflowers that grow and flower in fall — 45 to 60 days from seed to bloom — as the days get shorter. They feature large, almost-ruffled yellow flowers that last many days in a vase. They are a single-flower plant, growing 4 to 5 feet tall.

Name: Gold Coin marigold

Description: This marigold is the longest-lasting cut flower Ziegler grows. The plants stand 36 inches tall, producing flowers the size of tennis balls. Marigolds are also great traps for Japanese beetles in July. Just flick the beetles off the blooms into a can of soapy water and watch them drown. If you dislike the flower's stinky foliage indoors, strip it off and use stems of lemon basil in your arrangement.

Name: Celosia

Description: The hotter and drier it gets, the better this family of flowers performs. Cramer's lime green, burgundy and rose are the best varieties for drying. Pampas Plume is a mix of feathery blooms and spikes in a variety of colors such as hot pink, white, cream and two-tone maroon. Some celosias are called cockscomb.

Name: Benary's Giants zinnias

Description: They bloom early summer to frost if they are cut weekly. They look good in the garden and in bouquets — and butterflies and bees adore them. Zinnias come in all colors, have a long vase life, thrive in the heat and tolerate drought. When mildew is a problem on the foliage, strip the leaves and, again, use lemon basil stems for foliage in your prettiest container.

ProCut sunflowers bloom nicely in fall.

News to Use

Here are Lisa Ziegler's tips for creating your own cut-flower garden:

Start small. A 3-by-10-foot bed produces enough cut flowers for you — and a friend.

Place it right. Place the garden where you can't see it, especially from the kitchen window. "If you see those beauties from the house, you will never cut them and bring them indoors," she says.

Prep your soil. Spend more time preparing the soil and adding more organic matter than you think you should. Organic matter allows air, water, worms and roots to roam freely in your bed.

Plant properly. If you put in plants, mulch them

immediately to prevent weeds. For seeds, mulch after they have sprouted and are more than 8 inches tall.

Ziegler covers her plantings with a floating row cover for 10 to 14 days to protect young plants from drying wind, hot sun, hungry rabbits and squirrels burying winter treasures.

What is a floating row cover? It's a lightweight, breathable fabric that's available through mail-order garden catalogs and at local garden stores.

Give it TLC. Keep your new cut-flower bed watered until it's established — a week or so for young transplants and longer for seeds to germinate. To keep your bed producing, harvest flowers weekly even if you don't need them — take them to a local nursing home. The first time you skip cutting your flowers is the beginning of the end of your cutting garden.

Who is Lisa Ziegler?

A Newport News resident, she owns The Gardener's Workshop, an online garden store.



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Ziegler, with sister Suzanne Frye and sister-in-law Sara Mason, also does free "In the Garden" and group programs and sells seasonal fresh-cut flowers. They demonstrate living wreaths and container gardens 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

Saturday during Yorktown Market Days at the York River waterfront. Visit shoptgw.com or call 877-7159 or (868) 977-7159.

Her favorite cut flower garden collections? The Lazy Gardener Seed Collection for planting in the fall or the Cutting Garden Seed Collection for planting in the spring.



Suzanne Frye arranges cut flowers in vases.

