

Shades of a sunset

- 1 Antirrhinum HA/HP** Flowers: Jul-frost. Height x spread: 60 x 30cm (24 x 12in). Vase life: a week.
- 2 Dahlia 'Amberglow' TP** Flowers: Jul-frost. 90 x 60cm (35 x 24in). Lasts a week.
- 3 Dahlia 'Karma Naomi' TP** Flowers: Jul-frost. 90 x 60cm (35 x 24in). Lasts a week.
- 4 Dianthus barbatus Auricula-Eyed Mixed HA** Flowers: Jun-Aug. 60 x 30cm (24 x 12in). Lasts a week.
- 5 Helenium 'Sahin's Early Flowerer' HP** Flowers: Jun-Oct. 1m x 60cm (39 x 24in). Lasts two weeks.
- 6 Hibiscus acetosella 'Mahogany Splendor' TP** Foliage: Jul-frost. 90 x 60cm (35 x 24in). Lasts a week.
- 7 Panicum 'Frosted Explosion' HHA** Flowers: Jul-frost. 60 x 30cm (24 x 12in). Dries well.
- 8 Scabiosa atropurpurea 'Fire King' HA** Flowers: Jun-frost. 80 x 40cm (31 x 16in). Lasts a week.
- 9 Scabiosa stellata 'Sternkugel' HA** Flowers: Jul-Sep. 30cm (12in). Dries well.
- 10 Tagetes patula 'Cinnabar' HHA** Flowers: Jul-Oct. 70 x 30cm (28 x 12in). Lasts up to a week.
- 11 Tropaeolum majus 'Black Velvet' HHA** Flowers: Jul-Sep. 30 x 50cm (12 x 20in). Lasts a week.



KEY

- HA hardy annual
- HHA half-hardy annual
- HP hardy perennial
- TP tender perennial



Flowers from home

Use garden borders or free up an allotment bed to grow an attractive supply of summer cut flowers

Author: **Louise Curley**, garden writer and author of *The Cut Flower Patch* and *The Crafted Garden*. Photography: **Tim Sandall**

The joy of growing cut flowers is that you can choose what to pick and arrange, rather than having to rely on florists or supermarkets. Unlike commercial growers, you need not be constrained by whether flowers have long stems, uniform blooms and how well they will withstand the supply chain. In short, you can choose to grow the flowers that you love.

Deciding what to grow

Any flowers and foliage from the garden can be cut. However, some plants are better candidates than others, and for a constant supply throughout summer there are certain qualities you need to look for to maximise flower production. Consider how long a flower lasts in the vase – it seems a shame to pick a flower that may last for weeks on the plant but will wilt and shed its petals within minutes of being cut. Most blooms in my allotment cut-flower patch will last at least five days once they are picked.

The mainstays of any cutting garden are hardy and half-hardy annuals – the 'cut-and-come-again' flower equivalent of salad leaves which will provide buckets of flowers throughout summer. Their long flowering season – at least three months – and the fact they are easy and inexpensive from seed makes them must-haves for any cut-flower grower. >>>38



An allotment can be a great place for a cutting garden - in this case the author's.

Pretty blues and purples

- 1 *Allium sphaerocephalon* HP**
Flowers: Jul-Aug. Height x spread: 80 x 15cm (31 x 6in). Vase life: lasts 10 days.
- 2 *Consolida ajacis* 'Misty Lavender' HA** Flowers: Jul-Sep. 80 x 40cm (31 x 16in). Lasts a week.
- 3 *Cosmos bipinnatus* 'Psyche Rose Picotee' HHA** Flowers: Jun-frost. 80 x 45cm (31 x 18in). Lasts a week.
- 4 *Dianthus* Memories ('WP11 Gwe04') HP** Flowers: May-frost. 30 x 35cm (12 x 14in). Lasts five days.
- 5 *Lagurus ovatus* HA**
Flowers: Jul-frost. 40 x 30cm (16 x 12in). Dries well.
- 6 *Limonium platyphyllum* HP**
Flowers: Aug-Sep. 60 x 30cm (24 x 12in). Dries well.
- 7 *Limonium sinuatum* 'Iceberg' HHA**
Flowers: Jul-Sep. 45 x 30cm (18 x 12in). Dries well.
- 8 *Nigella damascena* 'Mulberry Rose' HA** Flowers: Jun-Aug. 40 x 30cm (16 x 12in). Lasts five days; seed pods dry well.
- 9 *Santolina chamaecyparissus* HP**
Foliage: Apr-Oct. 60 x 90cm (24 x 35in). Lasts five days.
- 10 *Scabiosa atropurpurea* 'Blue Cockade' HA** Flowers: Jun-frost. 80 x 40cm (31 x 16in). Lasts a week.
- 11 *Trachymene coerulea* [Lace Mixture] HA** Flowers: late Jul-frost. 50 x 30cm (20 x 12in). Lasts a week.



Rustic collection

- 1 *Achillea ageratum* HP**
Flowers: Jul-Oct. Height x spread: 45 x 40cm (18 x 16in). Lasts 10 days.
- 2 *Achillea* 'Terracotta' HP**
Flowers: Jul-Oct. 80 x 40cm (31 x 16in). Lasts 10 days.
- 3 *Antirrhinum majus* [Maximum Mixed] HA/HP**
Flowers: Jul-frost. 60 x 30cm (24 x 12in). Lasts a week.
- 4 *Centaurea cyanus* 'Blue Boy' HA**
Flowers: Jun-Sep. 90 x 40cm (35 x 16in). Lasts five days.
- 5 *Cosmos bipinnatus* 'Xanthos' HHA** Flowers: Jun-frost. 60 x 40cm (24 x 16in). Lasts five days.
- 6 *Dahlia* 'Karma Serena' TP**
Flowers: Jul-frost. 90 x 60cm (35 x 24in). Lasts a week.
- 7 *Foeniculum vulgare* 'Purpureum' HP**
Flowers: Jul-Sep. 1.8 x 1m (71 x 39in). Lasts a week.
- 8 *Helianthus debilis* subsp. *cucumerifolius* 'Italian White' HHA**
Flowers: Jul-frost. 1.5m x 60cm (59 x 24in). Lasts five days.
- 9 *Panicum* 'Frosted Explosion' HHA**
Flowers: Jul-frost. 60 x 30cm (24 x 12in). Dries well.
- 10 *Salvia patens* HP** Flowers: Jul-frost. 45 x 35cm (18 x 14in). Lasts a week.
- 11 *Scabiosa atropurpurea* 'Fata Morgana' HA** Flowers: Jun-frost. 80 x 40cm (31 x 16in). Lasts a week.



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Approach to growing

35 ◀◀ If you already grow bulbs, perennials and shrubs in the borders of your garden, many of these will make good cutting material. A simple way to gain additional colour for picking is to weave annuals and biennials in among these. However, if you are able to dedicate a whole patch of soil to cut flowers – perhaps a bed or two in the vegetable garden or allotment – more possibilities become available.

Using a dedicated area means flowers can be treated as a crop, and you will not denude the garden with each picking. It also makes it easier to organise the space – annuals and biennials can be planted in rows as you would vegetables – which makes weeding, picking and staking more straightforward. Choose flowers for their vase, rather than garden, appeal.

Ideally, the site should be sunny and sheltered with a moist but well-drained, neutral soil. Add well-rotted manure and compost to improve the soil; staking or growing plants through bean netting will help if the site is windy. Beds on my allotment are 6 x 1.2m (20 x 4ft) and I have five devoted to cut flowers, but two beds would give a good enough supply of flowers over the summer.

Flower combinations

Free-flowering annuals will make up the bulk of your floral arrangements, but add in some fragrant foliage and blooms from the herb garden such as mint, fennel and dill; the occasional branch from a shrub; and a stem or two from your favourite rose or herbaceous perennial. To extend the season include biennials – many will flower from late May to midsummer. Other must-haves in my cutting garden are dahlias, for their abundance of vibrant flowers lasting right through to the first frosts.

There is a huge amount of satisfaction to be gained from filling a bucket with home-grown flowers. Choose the most prolific annuals and biennials, and you'll be able to decorate your home with vases of pretty blooms, with none of the air miles of shop-bought flowers. ●



Success for your own flower factory

While you can grow flowers for cutting within ornamental borders, the ideal is to have a dedicated area for cutting; here blooms can be cropped without fear of affecting displays. An allotment (above) or vegetable plot is a good location.



Choose a range of plants for cutting; poppy flowers are followed by attractive seedheads, while alliums and later dahlias (above, left) extend the season.

Taller flowers, such as cornflowers, may need support in exposed locations. A great solution is to grow through bean netting attached to low posts (left).

'...growing plants through bean netting will help if the site is windy.'