

A CUT ABOVE the Rest

Transform your small space into a productive cut flower garden.

BY CARLY EVANS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHÉLE M. WAITE

DO YOU WANT A CUT FLOWER GARDEN but have little or no space? You don't need a farm with a hundred acres to create a beautiful cut flower garden. As Erin Benzakein shares in her new book, *Floret Farm's Cut Flower Garden: Grow, Harvest & Arrange Stunning Seasonal Blooms*, with enough commitment and passion, you can create dazzling arrangements right from your own backyard.

Anyone can make *space for a cut flower garden* and make it successful.



These black tubs hold pounds of dahlias ready for arrangements. The deep red and soft orange colors will make many alluring springtime garlands.

Fill your garden with blooms of declaration, yankee doodle, Katherine Havemeyer and Madame Florent Stepman. Their purple blooms and the delicate cream colors sing of spring.



(yankee doodle)



(Madame Florent Stepman)



(Katherine Havemeyer)

SPRING SPROUTS

5 best flowers for spring

Daffodils. This diverse family of flowers is great for spring. In order to reap the rewards, you need to plant these seeds in autumn. Amend the soil with compost and add bulb fertilizer to get them started.

Peonies. Plant these blossoms before the cold of winter and in full sun. Most soil will work fine. However, you need to avoid standing water for peonies, so make sure the area is well drained. The best environment is amended soil with manure or compost and a phosphate-rich fertilizer.

Sweet peas. The spring-flowering variety of this bloom needs 11 hours of daylight and should be sown in autumn if you have mild winters or early spring for cooler regions. To speed up the sprouting process, soak the seeds for 24 hours before planting. Compost or well-rotted manure will enrich this plant.

Tulips. An easy spring bulb, plant tulips in fall with full sun. They require at least six weeks of freezing temperatures, and do well in most soil types. Just make sure the soil is freely draining, or the bulbs will rot.

Lilacs. Plant these flowers in autumn under a thick layer of mulch. This keeps weeds down and helps the soil retain moisture. Although lilacs take 3-4 years to bloom, the lilac bush can live for decades.

PLANNING YOUR GARDEN

A cut flower garden's main purpose is not to show off a display of flowers, but to provide you with a full range of blooming beauties throughout the seasons. But before you begin, you need to plan your garden's layout and prepare the space. Define the site with markers or caution tape to give you an idea of how much room you have to work with, then perform a soil test so you know if you need to add any additional fertilizer or nutrients to the ground before you plant. Don't skip these initial steps. "I have seen many gardeners build raised beds on top of driveways, old tennis courts, and even their garage roofs to raise flowers and vegetables with great success," Benzakein writes. Anyone can make space for a cut flower garden—just remember that it's important to plan before you plant.



A small blossom can speak volumes. Hardy annuals come in greens, blues, whites and purples. Present small bunches of love-in-a-mist or larkspur in a flower crown for added flair.



A bucket of elegant, bright pink roses boasts the power of a cut flower garden. These blooms will become an essential part of a beautiful bouquet.

"Consider going up rather than out with your plantings."

WORKING WITH YOUR SPACE

Especially if you have little space, it's important to think about maximizing what you have. If your area is tight, Benzakein writes, "Consider going up rather than out with your plantings. Vines and vine-like growers are some of the best sources for cutting material and, when grown on a trellis, require minimal ground area." Going vertical is just one of the ways you can use your space wisely. You can also pack in your plants tightly. "When it comes to annual flowering plants, ignore what the back of the seed packet says in terms of spacing," Benzakein writes. These kinds of blossoms don't need much room—they can survive close together. Just remember to weed out any interlopers. Then wait for those little seedlings to produce bountiful bouquets for your farmhouse all year round. Whether you only have the space for a few potted plants or you own a couple acres, you can plant a prospering cut flower garden.

PINCHING YOUR PLANTS

How to renew your blooms

HOW TO PINCH

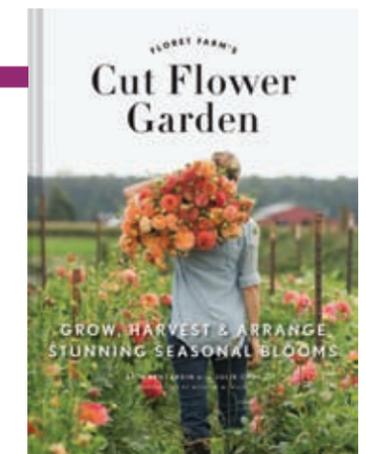
The pinching process creates a more abundant flower production, because cutting or pinching off the top growth communicates to the plant to send up numerous stems right below the cut. In order to pinch, you'll need sharp pruners. Snip the top 3-4 inches off of your plant. Make sure you do this just above a set of leaves.

WHAT TO PINCH

While this process will enhance the production of certain blooms, you'll only benefit flowering annuals that have a branching form. These include amaranth, branching sunflowers, celosia, snapdragons, cosmos and dahlias. This method will not benefit single stem flowers.

WHEN TO PINCH

The best time to pinch is when the young plant has reached 8-12 inches tall and has just 3-5 sets of leaves. The pinching process needs to happen before the plant has a chance to set a flower bud.



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