

Dr. Bill: What's Worked for Me this Summer

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Welcome to the summer guide to gardening in Texas! In this quarterly series, I will discuss success that I have experienced each season in my garden and want to share with you.

Cut Flower Gardening

Garden flowers are more popular than ever for decorating homes. Not to be overlooked is the economy of having one's own source for cut flowers and some gardeners are even creating a business of growing and marketing cut flowers. Growing flowers authentic to the period of a historic home is another opportunity.

Creating a separate garden for cut flowers is a way to avoid detracting from the landscape when large volumes of flowers are needed inside the home. Annual and perennial flowers may be grown in rows in a separate garden where they are easily gathered and maintained. Cutting gardens need not be unattractive, but it is sensible to plan to locate them in an area where they are not the focal point when not at their peak. Finer estates would sometimes have a separate area devoted to producing the favorite cut flowers of the family such as marigolds, zinnias, poppies, sweet peas, bells of Ireland, celosia, nasturtium, globe amaranth, larkspur, and poppies. These flowers were frequently found in vegetable and cutting gardens of our ancestors. Among favorite perennials are Shasta daisies, phlox, and chrysanthemums. Soil preparation and fertilization should be similar to producing vegetables. Addition of organic material like composted pine bark or your own compost and addition of fertilizer is ideally based upon having a soil test which can be obtained through your local county office of Texas the AgriLife Extension Service. I like to add small amounts of nitrogen such as 21-0-0 several times during the growing season to boost production.

Certain shrubs and trees are also valuable as flowers and foliage for cutting. Southern magnolias (*Magnolia grandiflora*) have beautiful, long lasting foliage and showy buds. Oriental magnolias (*Magnolia x soulangeana*) have showy buds and flowers as do dogwood (*Cornus florida*), pomegranate, and vitex (*Vitex agnus-castis*). Shrubs to cut include mock orange (*Philadelphus coronaries*), flowering quince (*Chaenomeles speciosa*) and flowering almond (*Prunus glandulosa*).

Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Dlwd1J8VuY>

The information on the care and handling of cut plant materials, floral preservatives, and special treatments is provided by Jim Johnson, AAF, AIFD, TMF, Director of the Benz School of Floral Design at Texas A & M University, and Kimberly Williams, SAIFD.

Care and Handling of Cut Plant Materials

1. Harvest garden flowers during the coolest time of day when they are crisp and turgid-early morning or late evening. However, if the flowers have been purchased, remove the wrappings and bindings so the stems can be separated.
2. Remove lower foliage that would remain underwater in the storage container.
3. Cut stems with a sharp instrument, making the cuts underwater if possible. This prevents air bubbles from 'clogging' the stems.
4. Place the materials in clean containers of lukewarm water with preservative added (room temperature up to 100 degrees F.).
5. Always keep cut material in water while designing. This will prevent wilt due to the loss of water through transpiration.
6. Always design in clean containers that have been filled with preservative water.
7. After each use, clean storage containers, vases, liners, and needle point holders with a soapy Clorox7 solution, to kill all bacteria.
8. Use a floral preservative to provide nutrients and to prevent bacterial growth.

Floral Preservatives

The formula for floral preservatives is simple. It consists of three prime ingredients:

- Sugar (dextrose, not table sugar). It provides a carbohydrate energy source so flowers can carry on the process of respiration. This helps buds to develop into flowers.

- Biocide (controls the growth of bacteria). Without it, the addition of sugar to lukewarm water would increase bacteria which would plug the stems and shorten the life of the cut flower.
- Acidifier (lowers the pH of the water and improves water uptake).

(Commercial floral preservatives may be purchased in liquid or powder form at retail florists. Be sure to follow the instructions exactly as written. A perfectly acceptable home substitute is Listerine mouthwash. (one ounce of Listerine per gallon of water will provide the correct solution).

Special Treatments

Plants vary in composition and growth habit; therefore, care and handling techniques may vary.

- Avoid using the tender new growth of most plants, as it has not developed a cell structure sturdy enough to keep it from wilting.
- Short-lived blossoms such as daylilies, hibiscus, iris, lotus, magnolia, and passion flowers should be cut in the bud stage and allowed to open in the finished design.
- The long standing practice of crushing woody stems is not recommended, because this damages the cell structure and actually impedes water uptake. Make a clean cut instead.
- Blossoms with tremendous petal surface area compared to their small stem size benefit from being submerged in water at room temperature.
- Depending on their petal substance and color, blossoms can remain underwater for a few minutes (white and pastel camellias, gardenias, orchids and roses) to a few hours (anthuriums gerberas, hydrangeas, lilacs, dark colored roses and most other tropical flowers). Wilted flowers can be revived by cutting the stem underwater and submerging the entire flower until revived.



Hardy Amaryllis



'Mrs. James Hendry' crinum



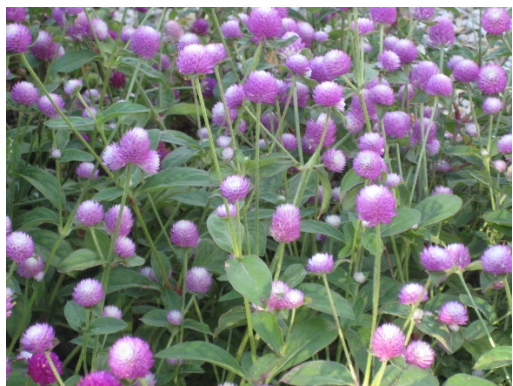
Sweet Peas



Zinnias



Texas Bluebells



Bachelor Buttons

Annuals and Perennials Useful as Cutflowers

ANNUALS	
French Hollyhock	<i>Althea zebrina</i> , <i>Malva sylestris zebrina</i>

Snapdragon	<i>Antirrhinum majus</i>
Calendula	<i>Calendula officinalis</i>
Cockscomb	<i>Celosia argentia</i>
Cornflower	<i>Centaurea cyanus</i>
Cleome	<i>Cleome hasslerana</i>
Cosmos	<i>Cosmos bipinnatus</i>
Feverfew	<i>Chrysanthemum parthenium</i>
Hyacinth Bean	<i>Dolichos lablab</i>
Bluebell	<i>Eustoma grandiflora</i>
Globe Amaranth (Bachelor Button)	<i>Gomphrena globosa</i>
Baby's Breath	<i>Gypsophila paniculata</i>
Sunflower	<i>Helianthus annuus</i>
Larkspur	<i>Consolida ajaris</i>
Pinks	<i>Dianthus plumarius</i>
Candytuft	<i>Iberis umbellata</i>
Standing Cypress	<i>Ipomopsis rubra</i>
Sweetpea	<i>Lathyrus odoratus</i>
Stock	<i>Mathiola incana</i>
Statice	<i>Limonium</i> spp.
Nasturtium	<i>Tropaeolum majus</i>
Marigold	<i>Tagetes</i> spp.
Pansy	<i>Viola tricolor</i>
Zinnia	<i>Zinnia elegans</i>

PERENNIALS

Yarrow	<i>Achillea</i> spp.
Coral Vine	<i>Antigonon leptopus</i>
Aster	<i>Aster</i> spp.
Ornamental Onions	<i>Allium</i> spp.
Peruvian Lily	<i>Alstroemeria pulchella</i>
Columbine	<i>Aquilegia</i> spp.
Butterfly Weed	<i>Asclepias</i> spp.
Aspidistra	<i>Aspidistra elatior</i>
Garden Asparagus	<i>Asparagus officinalis</i>
Canna	<i>Canna x generalis</i>
Chrysanthemum	<i>Chrysanthemum x morifolium</i>
Shasta Daisy	<i>Chrysanthemum x superbum</i>
Oxeye Daisy	<i>Chrysanthemum leucanthemum</i>
Clerodendrum	<i>Clerodendrum x speciosum</i>
Coreopsis	<i>Coreopsis lanceolata</i>
Crinum	<i>Crinum</i> spp.

Montbretia	<i>Crocsmia pottsii</i>
Gardens Pinks and Carnations	<i>Dianthus</i> spp.
Purple Coneflower	<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>
Hardy Ageratum	<i>Eupatorium coelestinum</i>
Ferns	<i>Dryopteris normalis</i>
Leatherleaf Fern	<i>Rumohra adiantiformis</i>
Gerbera Daisy	<i>Gerbera jamesonii</i>
Gingers	<i>Alpinia, Costus, Curcuma, Hedychium, Zinziber</i>
Gladiolus	<i>Gladiolus x hortulanus</i>
Sunflower	<i>Helianthus</i> spp.
Amaryllis	<i>Hippeastrum</i> spp.
Hyacinth	<i>Hyacinthus</i> spp.
Iris	<i>Iris</i> spp.
Red Hot Poker	<i>Kniphofia uvaria</i>
Snowflake	<i>Leucojum aestivum</i>
Liatris, Gayfeather	<i>Liatris</i> spp.
Lily	<i>Lilium candidum, L. tigrinum, L. formosanum</i>
Spider Lily	<i>Lycoris radiata</i>
Purple Loosestrife	<i>Lythrum salicaria</i>
Narcissus, Daffodils	<i>Narcissus</i> spp.
Penstemon	<i>Penstemon</i> spp.
Summer Phlox	<i>Phlox paniculata</i>
Obedient Plant	<i>Physostegia virginiana</i>
Balloon Flower	<i>Platycodon grandiflorus</i>
Tuberose	<i>Polianthes tuberosa</i>
Salvia	<i>Salvia leucantha</i>
Indigo Spires	<i>S. X 'Indigo Spires'</i>
Butterfly Vine	<i>Stigmaphyllon ciliatum</i>
Stoke's Aster	<i>Stokesia laevis</i>
Mexican Marigold Mint	<i>Tagetes lucida</i>
Society Garlic	<i>Tulbaghia violacea</i>
Calla Lily	<i>Zantedeschia aethiopica</i>

Parts of the above and additional information are from *Perennial Garden Color* by William C. Welch (Taylor Publishing Co., Dallas)

Vines for Floral Design

Vines are a critical part of landscape design. They add a dimension unlike any other plant. They can help provide privacy and while adding a distinctive dimension often using very little ground space. Rambling roses are not true vines but can also provide considerable effect with little effort. The following vines produce useful flowers and/or foliage for cut flower use.

Coral Honeysuckle - *Lonicera sempervirens* - This is actually a native Texas vine with beautiful coral colored flowers, a restrained growth habit, and bluish green evergreen foliage. It thrives in sun or partial shade and is reasonably cold and drought tolerant. The flowers are long lasting and often recur after the main bloom in mid-spring.

Butterfly Vine - *Stigmaphyllon ciliatum* - Butterfly Vine is a quick growing interesting vine. It will quickly cover structures with semi-tropical foliage, bright clusters of yellow flowers, and chartreuse colored seedpods that resemble butterflies. They naturally mature on the plant or may be cut and dried once mature. The fruit is long lasting and matures to a beautiful tan or brown. Because of its tenderness to cold, this plant is sometimes cultivated in greenhouses and other closed structures. The vine thrives in sunny, well drained locations and flowers from mid-summer through fall. Propagation is from cuttings or natural layers that often occur near the original clump.

Coral Vine - *Antigonon leptopus* - Coral vine is a fast growing semi-tropical vine that covers itself with bright coral or rarely white blossoms. At its best it frames a garden like fine lace. It is usually a perennial and forms sweet potato like tubers that some sources describe as edible. It is an integral part of many South Texas and Gulf-South gardens. The heart shaped foliage vigorously covers trellises, fences and arbors and bursts into flowers mid-summer through fall. Coral Vine prefers a sunny, well-drained location and its somewhat rampant growth should be cut back to ground level in late fall.

Hyacinth Bean - *Dolichos lablab* - Hyacinth bean is a beautiful, fall flowering vine that mounts an impressive display of sweet pea-like flowers in late summer and fall. It is probably of Old World origin, though Thomas Jefferson grew it on interesting overhead structures made of tree limbs at Monticello, his Virginia home. Leaves are light green and divided, fan-like, into three leaflets. The stunning flowers are followed by velvety 2-3" pods of dark purple. Both flowers and beans are useful as cut material. It is used primarily for fast summer shade and treated as an annual. Seed may be easily saved and planted the next spring, although seedlings often return in the vicinity of last year's plants.

Smilax smallii - Lance-like greenbrier or Jackson Vine - Smilax is a native evergreen vine used extensively in the past as a florist green. It is also occasionally used to decorate porch columns and arches. It is thornless but closely related to a very thorny and weedy form that is more commonly native across the South. As a florist green, Smilax is long lasting and graceful. The fruit is a dull red or reddish brown berry that occur in clusters that usually ripen in June.



Coral Honeysuckle



Coral Vine



Butterfly Vine



Smilax, Jackson Vine