

# What cut flowers can I grow in Illinois?



**Illinois Extension**  
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

## Cut Flower Gardening

### CHOOSING A SITE

**Sun vs. Shade:** Most cut flowers will be sun preferring.

**Soil Quality:** Getting a soil test is always recommended.

- **Raised Bed:** This is a great option for areas with low-quality soil or for the convenience and ease. Every few years add new compost.
- **Ground Bed:** This route is great if you are looking to grow a larger amount of cut flowers.
- **Incorporated into Landscaping:** This is a good option if you don't have the space for a designated flower garden.

**Water Availability:** Water should be easily accessible. Consider soaker hoses or drip irrigation

**Fertilizer:** Fertilize annuals and summer bulbs every other week with a liquid feed or use a slow release fertilizer.

### GROWING CONSIDERATIONS

**Will you start from seed?**

- Cheaper, more variety available
- Need the appropriate indoor space

**Will you purchase transplants?**

- More costly, but saves time and space
- Less options on varieties

**What other supplies will you need?** Some cut flowers need stakes, netting, etc. for a straight stem and quality product.

### HARVESTING

**Maturity to cut:** Flowers will mature quickly determining the right time to cut is important. Some are best cut just before blooms are fully developed, some are best cut in the bud stage, some are best cut at the fully open stage.

**Time to cut:** Cut flowers in late afternoon or evening when lots of food is stored up. The morning is next best time of the day. Cut stems longer than needed.

**Storage:** Remove foliage that will be in water and place in warm water. Allow uptake for 1-2 hours.



### FULL SUN ANNUALS

**Harvested when fully open**

- **Zinnia** is easy to direct seed and germinates quickly. Staking is sometimes needed. Choose a mildew resistant variety if possible
- **Strawflower** can be started by seed indoors. Stem length varies by variety. Taller ones may need staking. Great as dried flowers.
- **Celosia** is easy to direct seed or start seed indoors and lots of colors are available.
- **Gomphrena** is usually started from transplants and is great as dried flowers.
- **Amaranthus** grows either upright or hanging depending on the variety. Is great as dried flower. The seed germinates easily by either direct seeding or start your own transplants. Hanging varieties need to be staked.
- **Cosmos** are easy to direct seed or start transplants. Heights and flowers vary depending on the variety.
- **Annual Black-eyed Susan** has more variety in flower colors than the perennial. Many will reseed and come back the following year.
- **Sunflowers** are easy to direct seed or start your own transplants. Taller varieties need to be staked. Seed saving is easy.





## SUMMER BULBS

- **Dahlias** are tuberous root planted after danger of frost and then dug at the end of the season to save. They require full sun and consistent moisture. Staking is usually required. Dahlias are harvested when they are fully opened.
- **Gladiolus corms** planted after danger of frost and then dug at the end of the season to save. They require full sun and consistent moisture. Staking is usually required. Harvested when the first few florets at the bottom are open.

## PERENNIALS

Stagger out your blooming times — spring, summer and fall — to always have flowers available.

- **Hellebores** is one of the earliest blooming shade perennials. Harvest when fully open. If harvested after stamens have dropped off, will have a longer vase life.
- **Bleeding Heart** is an early blooming spring perennial. Harvest when fully open.
- **Peonies** are a full sun perennial. Harvest when buds are in “marshmallow” stage. This is when they are showing color and soft. If you strip off foliage and wrap bundles in newspaper, they will last up to 6-8 weeks.
- **Lady’s Mantle** is a sun perennial blooming in the spring where flowers and foliage can both be used. Harvest when flowers are open.
- **Siberian iris** make better cut flowers than bearded iris because they have a much longer vase life. Harvest when flower are just starting to open and are showing color.
- **Poppies** are late spring to early summer full sun perennials. Harvest flower when the buds are just starting to show color.

- **Astilbe** is a shade loving late spring to early summer perennial that requires additional moisture. Harvest when flowers are fully open.
- **Liatris** is an easy to grow full sun summer blooming perennial. Harvest when flowers are fully open.
- **Coneflowers** are easy to grow. These full sun summer blooming perennials have a long flowering period. Harvest when fully open. Can use the center of flower once petals have faded.
- **Sea Holly** is a full sun summer perennial. The flower are blue and thistle like. Harvest when flowers are fully open.
- **Yarrow** is easy to grow full sun summer blooming perennial. Harvest when flower are fully open and can be used as dried flower.
- **Autumn Joy** is an easy to grow, full sun to part shade fall blooming perennial. Harvest when flowers are fully open.

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## AUTHOR

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## MORE INFORMATION

- Four Seasons Webinar Slow Flowers: Grow your own Cut Flowers, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=zjGMpBy97LM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zjGMpBy97LM)
- Small Farms winter Webinar Series Slow Flowers: Small-Scale Cut Flower Production, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=9exYQkLAY6k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9exYQkLAY6k)
- Small Farms Winter Webinar Series Spring and summer Bulbs for Cut Flower Production, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=5xqep64so8M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5xqep64so8M)



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