

by deryn thorpe

blooms from the garden

Selecting a bunch of flowers from your local florist is always a treat, but it can be more satisfying to grow your own. With a little planning, you can have vases filled straight from a cutting garden in your backyard

Flowers always lift the spirits and make a house seem like a home, so my garden abounds with blooms that I can cut and bring indoors. To ensure that I have a good selection to cut for the vase year-round, I like to grow a range of perennials and shrubs for flowers and foliage, as well as seed-grown annuals.

Over the years, I have collected a wide selection of vases – tall ones for long-stemmed flowers, jars for bushy arrangements, rose bowls, single bloom vases, float bowls and posy jugs – so there is a suitable container for whatever is in bloom. I also grow my own foliage as 'greenery'. That way it takes fewer flowers to make an arrangement look good.

If you have a small garden, sprinkle flowers through the borders. Those with bigger gardens can have the luxury of a separate 'picking bed' for plants with great flowers but poor form. An example is Hybrid Tea roses, which are usually the best for cutting as they have tight flower buds and long stems. However, most are very tall growers with an upright shape that is too rigid for a relaxed garden. One solution to this is to use Floribunda and Heritage Roses, which generally don't have the long stems but still produce beautiful blooms.

Bulbs such as tulip, daffodil, iris and ranunculus create a meadow effect when scattered through the borders for flowers in late winter and spring.

Tulip, daffodil, iris and ranunculus create a meadow effect when scattered through borders

Some of the top seed-grown flowers are cosmos (simple to grow and flower for most of the year), Queen Anne's lace (for the delicate, domed flower heads), and sweet pea (for the glorious fragrance). Try staggering the planting so they don't all flower at once. Annuals are inexpensive and produce more flowers in a season than perennials, and you can change the selection each year.

In terms of foliage, butcher's broom (*Ruscus* spp.) is a good choice. It likes dappled shade, tolerates root competition and suits temperate to subtropical areas. Its 1m-tall stems have shiny green 'leaves', which are actually flattened stems, and it's revered by florists as the cut stems survive in a vase for four or more months. Other good-looking foliage includes orange jessamine (*Murraya paniculata*), leucadendron and camellia. Variegated ivy can be used to make wreaths and the coloured leaf of sweet potato vines are perfect for the float bowl.

TIPS

- For maximum blooms, make sure you water, feed and deadhead flowers regularly.
- Cut flowers in the early morning, place in a bucket of water and let them rehydrate for an hour or more.
- Remove foliage that will be covered by vase water.
- Add a teaspoon of bleach to the water, and change water and re-cut stems frequently.

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CAUTION!
Some flowers are invasive. Check local regulations for weed status before planting.

By planting this way, you don't spoil the floral picture if you remove a few for the house. In winter, I cut branches festooned with the pompom flowers of the pin-cushion hakea and, as they fade, my Geraldton wax bush has a profusion of small flowers on long stems that last well in the vase.

Camellia is the queen of winter flowers and I use the perfect blooms in my float bowls. Frangipani flowers take pride of place in the bowls in summer. Home-cut flowers can also create family traditions. At Christmas, a friend cuts bunches of red-flowering gum (*Corymbia ficifolia*) to decorate the room. I use a line of cream gardenias, each one nestled in a tiny coffee cup, as the floral accent on my festive table. ▶

TOP HOME-GROWN CUT FLOWERS

Seeds delphinium, sweet pea, tall verbena, sunflower, zinnia, lisianthus, cosmos (right), cleome, corn cockle, nigella, Queen Anne's lace

Bulbs/corms/rhizomes dahlia, daffodil, tulip, jonquil, lily (Asiatic, calla and Christmas), alstroemeria, ranunculus, anemone, bluebell, gladioli

Shrubs lilac, wisteria, wintersweet, grevillea, flowering quince, deutzia, weigelia, hydrangea, forsythia, hypericum, lavender, rhododendron, rose, Geraldton wax, leucadendron, protea

Perennials coreopsis, aster, chrysanthemum, bush salvia (varieties such as 'Indigo Spires'), scabiosa, campanula





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8.

our top picks

1. beehive ginger (*Zingiber spectabile*)
Flowers in gold to chocolate colours for up to six months, from spring to autumn, in subtropical and tropical areas. ↑ 2m ↔ 0.9m ☀️ 🌧️ 🌱

2. delphinium (*Delphinium grandiflorum*)
Spikes of blue, pink or white flower in spring to early summer. Sow in autumn and winter in seed-raising mix, then transplant in spring. ↑ 1m ↔ 0.6m ☀️ 🌱

3. Hybrid Tea roses (*Rosa* spp.)
Every colour and flower type from spring to autumn. Try these velvet-red varieties: 'Mister Lincoln', 'Oklahoma' and 'Papa Meiland'. ↑ 2.4m ↔ 1.8m ☀️ 🌱

4. kangaroo paw (*Anigozanthos* spp.)
Recommended are disease-tolerant landscaping varieties such as 'Big Red', 'Kings Park Federation Flame' and 'Bush Gold'. Flowers spring to autumn. ↑ 2m ↔ 1m ☀️ 🌱

5. protea (*Protea* spp.)
Big pink, cream and red flowers originating in southern Africa. Flowers autumn to spring. ↑ 2m ↔ 2m ☀️ 🌱

6. Queen Anne's lace (*Ammi majus*)
Lacy flowers on tall stems in spring to summer. Scatter seeds about 50cm apart on soil in autumn to spring. ↑ 1.5m ↔ 1m ☀️ 🌱

7. torch heliconia (*Heliconia psittacorum*)
Flowers in yellow, orange or pink. The easiest tropical blooms for cooler climates. Flowers spring to autumn. ↑ 2m ↔ 0.8m ☀️ 🌧️ 🌱

8. tulip (*Tulipa* spp.)
Sophisticated single and double flowers in all colours, for southern areas of Australia. Plant in autumn for flowers from winter to spring. Lift bulbs after foliage dies down. Bulbs may re-bloom the following year in cool climates. ↑ 0.75m ↔ 0.3m ☀️ 🌱

Key

- ↑ height
- ↔ width
- ☀️ sun
- ☁️ dappled shade
- 🌱 perennial
- 🌿 annual
- 🌱 bulb