

Grow Your Own Bouquets

With these top 12 flowers



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Butternut Gardens LLC flower farm
Southport, CT

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1. Daffodils

Nothing means spring like cheery bright daffodils. There are many varieties from which to choose and they come back year after year, forming nice clumps. If you select an earlier blooming variety and a later blooming variety, you can easily extend your bouquet options! A great big yellow variety I grow here at Butternut Gardens is Marieke. A lovely soft yellow and white variety I like is Ice Follies. Double varieties usually bloom a bit later. Try some! You can cut daffodils in the “pencil” stage (bloom is not open and is still upright), the “gooseneck” stage (blooms still not open but have become downward facing) or the open stage. When you cut your daffodils, please put them into very hot water (not boiling) and leave them there until the water cools to room temperature. This will help them last longer.

2. Tulips

So many choices and they don’t take up much space at all. Plant in the fall. Plant them as close together as eggs in an egg carton. Wait for spring. Just be mindful that deer LOVE to eat tulips, so put a little wire or netting around them when they start to make their way through the soil in the spring. Like daffodils, you can get an early blooming variety and a later blooming variety. For great height, choose the late French tulip varieties. Your tulips will not produce reliable flowers after the first spring so you will have to buy some more each fall. Also, you must not plant tulip bulbs in the same location as the previous year.

For Spring

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3. Peonies

An old time favorite that begins to bloom at the end of May or early June. Best thing about peonies? Deer do not eat them so you can plant them anywhere! Peonies come in a number of shapes – single, double and “bomb” types, which have frillier, shorter center petals surrounded by longer outer petals. Colors are usually in the red, pink and white tones, although yellow varieties are newer on the market. Peonies can live to 100 years and are often dug up and passed to relatives or friends. The best time to cut peonies is when the buds are not yet open. In the flower farming business we say to cut them when the buds are in the “marshmallow” stage. Gently squeeze the buds and wait until they are a bit soft. Blooms open rather quickly after this. Also, ants do love the peony buds, so cut early in the morning.

For Summer



4. Yarrow – This is such an unassuming plant. It does not need extra special care. In fact, it favors a little neglect. The native yarrow is white. The garden varieties you can grow range from cream to peach to rose to red to bright yellow. So much choice! This plant is a perennial. It comes back year after year. It will spread but will not overtake an area. For a bright yellow with gorgeous silvery/grey foliage the variety “Coronation Gold” is a winner. For more muted tones some choices are ‘Peaches and Cream’, ‘Summer Pastels’, and ‘Summer

Berries.' All equally gorgeous. A word on cutting: you must wait until they have started to pollinate, or these yarrows will want to wilt. While these are not showy flowers, a bunch of cottage yarrow is most pleasing just the same.

5. Daisies

So many people love daisies. Nostalgic, romantic, and wild, with many links to childhood days. The 'daisies' that are best for the garden and for your cut flowers are also known as Shasta Daisies. They have larger flowers than our "native" roadside daisies (which actually are not native, but that's another story) and the foliage does not wilt like the wildflower type. These are wonderful in the late spring and early summer garden. *Leucanthemum* x *Superbum* 'Becky' is a nice single. A frilly type I like because it is quite interesting looking and lasts very well in arrangements is 'Aglia'. If you grow a plant of each type, you will find the single varieties usually start blooming just a bit earlier than the frillier type. So, you can get a longer bloom time. These daisies are perennials so you can plant them one year and get blooms year after year.

6. Zinnias

Who doesn't want bright, bold colors in the hot, sizzling months of July and August? Zinnias are a perfect bouquet flower. Called a "cut and come again" flower, zinnias keep on growing new flowers all summer long and right up to frost in the fall as long as you keep on cutting the flowers. The Benary's Giant or Benary's Blue Point varieties come in a marvelous color spectrum. Buying a mixed bunch of seeds is a great way to get the boldest display. Zinnias love hot weather. They are easy to grow from seed. You can wait until we are done with frost in the late spring and plant seeds directly in the ground. You can also wait until June or July to plant and they will also give you fantastic flowers. When frost comes, zinnias, which are annuals, are done, so you have to plant new ones each year.

7. Sunflowers

Sunflowers are so symbolic of summer. Everyone asks me if I have any for sale as soon as we start to get into the hot summer months. You can plant sunflower seeds outside once we are past the last spring frost. You can also start them indoors just a little bit before then. Here's the thing about sunflowers (or one of the things) – they take about 50 to 60 days to grow from seed to flower. Except for the branching types (which are also super nice) you might want to plant some seeds in late May for some blooms in late July. Then, you could plant some more seeds in June for blooms in August. See where we are going with this? The latest you want to plant is likely early to mid-August so that all bloom before frost hits again in the fall. One last "thing" about sunflowers: you don't have to give them a ton of space. The more space you give them, the bigger they get. For my

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bouquets, I'd rather have them smaller and more manageable in size, so I plant them about 6" apart and no more.

8. Ageratum

I don't know if it is just because I like the periwinkle blue of ageratum, or what, but this is such a favorite in my summer bouquets. Like zinnias and sunflowers, it has to be planted every year. Also, it is best to get the taller-growing varieties. I like 'Blue Planet' and 'Blue Horizon'. Ageratum takes longer to get growing than zinnias or sunflowers, so you can start seeds indoors in late spring if you want. Like zinnias, you can cut and recut flowers right up to frost. What I like is how nicely Ageratum mixes with some of the other flowers like zinnias. It really gives the bouquets a pop with its contrasting color. It is not a big flower, but is nice in bunches and, as I said, is a very nice filler with the other summer offerings.

9. Basil

For me, basil in bouquets is one of the best "inventions". The leaves are nice and fragrant, but I also let the plants bloom with their nice tall spike of flowers and then I cut for my arrangements. The spike shape is a wonderful addition, which lends a nice natural look to the finished bouquets. Basil loves heat and is easy to start from seed inside or out, but keep it inside until the last spring frosts have passed.

For Fall



10. Dahlias

Most people think of dahlias as being a fall flower. In actuality, most dahlias begin blooming in July and continue right on into fall until the first hard frost. So, yay, bonus flowers! Dahlias are nothing short of stunning. What is so exciting about dahlias is the incredible number of dahlia types you can plant and also the range of colors and color blends. Orange, peach, red, purple, lavender, maroon, white, cream, yellow and multi-colored in several different sizes and shapes from 1" little pom poms to the so-called dinner plate dahlias, which truly have blooms the size of dinner plates. Cutting dahlias prompts them to keep sending up more blooms, so cut away. Plant in the spring, enjoy all summer, and then you can either dig the plant up in the fall a few weeks after frost or you can buy new each year.

11. Celosia

Like dahlias, celosias, also known as cockscombs, can be summer flowers or fall flowers. Unlike dahlias, celosias are annuals, which bloom one year and are then done. In fact, some celosias are more like sunflowers, which you cut once and no more. Celosias offer many interesting bouquet options. Some celosias form plumes of flowers and some form so-called 'brain-type' flowers, which look like colorful brain formations. The reason I have included this in the fall flowers section is because celosias come in a range of red, maroon, peach, salmon and deep pink colors – all beautiful additions to your fall arrangements. Celosias also come in exquisite lime colors, which are fabulous for fall or summer. Seeds can be planted outside after the last spring frost. You can wait to plant until a bit later in the summer to get the later blooms in the fall.

12. Sedum

Sedum, also known as stone crop, is the last of my list of twelve top flowers for you to consider growing. 'Autumn Joy' is the variety I grow and recommend. I have had it in my gardens and bouquets for decades. Avoid the shorter-growing, or creeping stonecrops, of which there are many. This one is a perennial, which means you plant it one year and it keeps coming back year after year. What I love about 'Autumn Joy' is that you can use the stems when they have their first green/white flower buds, or when the buds have become light pink, then darker pink, and finally full rusty-pink in the fall. So, the colors follow the seasons. Also, the foliage is a beautiful soft green color, which is another bonus for your bouquets. Because this plant is a perennial, and you are cutting leaves (food-makers) as well as flowers, I recommend following this rule of thumb: do not cut more than 1/3 of the stems in any given year so the plant will thrive. This sedum will slowly spread out as it ages.

A Baker's Dozen Bonus



13. Hydrangea 'Limelight' or 'Little Lime'

This is the only shrub on this top 12 (now 13) flowers list, but I had to include it! Hydrangea in a bouquet is awesome. Hydrangea 'Limelight' is a Hydrangea paniculata type. It is not the blue or white so-called "mophead type" that many people think of when they think of hydrangeas. The benefit is that the flower buds form during the current growing season and, therefore, there is no risk of them being lost to winter damage. This means – hooray- you actually get flowers every year. The variety 'Little Lime' is like "Limelight" except smaller. This is quite a workhorse here at Butternut Gardens where I use the flowers in their green/white stage, in their blush pink stage, in their true fall deep rose and green stage – truly beautiful, and I can easily dry the blooms at any stage for fall or spring wreaths. Sometime between late fall and the next year's growing season, I cut any left over stems down to about 2' or 3' tops. The new year's branches and blooms will sprout from what I leave.

So, there you have it – a few flowers that can get you started growing your own bouquets.

Enjoy your gardens. Enjoy your bouquets.

Evelyn Lee, manager and owner

Butternut Gardens LLC

www.butternutgardens.com

Retail sales cottage open during the growing season only.

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