



## TESSELAAR PLANTS: CUTTING GARDENS TO BE THE 'NEXT BIG THING'

### Plan, plant and arrange cut botanicals with tips and tricks from garden pros

September 7, 2012 – What's the next big garden trend? Experts are betting on cutting gardens.

“As I travel the world in search of new plant breeds for Tesselaar, I've noticed cutting gardens are coming back,” says Anthony Tesselaar, cofounder and president of Tesselaar Plants. “Europe tends to be a bit ahead of the U.S. in terms of garden trends, and based on what I've seen there, I suspect cutting gardens will begin to gain momentum here in the U.S. once again.”

While experts are still attributing the rise in vegetable gardening to the slow economy, a recent survey by the National Gardening Bureau suggests there are still 11.2 million households in the U.S. that have continued to buy flower seeds along with vegetable seeds, and that's a lot of flower power. “After more than a decade of decline, America's cut flower production is on the rise, with significant increases every year,” declares the new book *The 50 Mile Bouquet* (2012, St. Lynn's Press), by Debra Prinzing, photographed by David Perry.

“I think the cost savings, self-expression and powerful connection to interior design's popularity in the media make cutting gardens a coming trend,” says Miriam Goldberger Jenkins, president and founder of Wildflower Farm, Canada's first pick-your-own flower farm in Coldwater, Ontario. “I myself have been absolutely besotted with cutting gardens for 25 years,” says Jenkins, whose passion is wildflowers as specialty cut flowers and whose farm specializes in wildflower and native grass seed production for gardens and meadows. “I love the endless amount of creativity it gives me, and the way it helps me bring nature inside my home.”

Want to grow your own cutting garden? Follow these simple steps from experts.

#### **STEP 1: Plan**

“When choosing plants for a cutting garden, first think about the containers you're going to put them in,” says Alana Miller, a floral designer and instructor in Rochester, NY. “If you want to design with taller items like vases, pitchers and bottles, you're going to need longer stems. If you'd like to use shorter containers like teapots, teacups, mason jars and crocks, you might want to grow something smaller in scale.”

Next, try to plan for a variety of colors, textures and shapes, as well as for larger “focal” plants and smaller “fillers.” If you want fresh-cut flowers all season, you'll also need spring, summer and fall bloomers. “At the same time, if you're just starting out,” warns Miller, “you might want to limit yourself to a half-dozen cutting garden plants, or you might find the project a bit overwhelming.” You can always add more in the future, she says.

And remember – “cut flowers” aren’t just flowers anymore. Yes, *The 50 Mile Bouquet* notes such flowers as peonies, dahlias, zinnias, roses, phlox, sweet peas, larkspur, bachelor’s buttons, bells of Ireland, sunflowers, gaillarda, anemones, rudbeckia, sea holly, nigella, passionflower, cosmos, Jerusalem sage, veronica, scabiosa and zinnias. But it also lists fruits and veggies like blackberries, rose hips, crabapples, Cinderella pumpkins, heirloom squash and artichokes; foliage like pea vines, succulents, ninebark, oat grass, ruby silk grass, Northern sea oats and lamb’s ears; and woody or papery elements like willow and chestnut tree branches, grapevine and seed pods from poppies and shoo-fly (a relative of Chinese lanterns).

“In the perfect world, you want both the stars and the fillers for an arrangement. But you can make a lovely display with only filler,” says Irvin Etienne, Horticultural Display Coordinator at the Indianapolis Museum of Art. “Don’t forget, foliage makes great filler,” he says. “Take a look at your shrubs and trees as potential helpers as well as cannas, cordylines and phormiums. An arrangement of all foliage can be stunning as well.”

Get the most for your dollar, suggests Tesselaar, by using plants with season-long interest that last a long time after cutting. “The full flower clusters of [Volcano phlox](#) and [Flower Carpet roses](#) are great choices, and work beautifully as fillers. And best of all, they just bloom and bloom, so using them as cut flowers in no way stops the amount of blooming you have in the garden.” Colorful foliage can also provide you with a full season of cuts. “The leaves of the wildly colorful [Tropicanna cannas](#) are stunners in a vase all by themselves,” says Tesselaar. “And don’t forget finishing flourishes, like the dark-red, strappy foliage of Festival Burgundy cordyline – they’re like exclamation points on the statement you’ve made.”

“Annuals, perennials, shrubs and trees are all used in my arrangements,” says Jenkins, who likes using unexpected picks like agapanthus flowers and colorful canna leaves just as much as traditional cutting garden favorites like roses and phlox. “I love working with fresh flowers, dried flowers, pods, branches, foliage, short stems, long stems, blossoms, seed pods, feathery grasses – anything!”

## **STEP 2: Plant**

Before you go ahead and start your cutting garden, you need to decide the best place to put it. “A formal cutting garden should be in the sun,” says Jenkins, noting that many annual cutting flowers need full sun to make the most blooms. “However, many great cuttables grow in the shade, too.”

Then there’s the question of integration.

“Some people prefer to install a separate bed for a cutting garden, so they don’t feel like they’re marring their ornamental landscape,” says Etienne. “Others purposely add plants for cutting throughout their landscape, making sure to plant lots of long-blooming perennials and flowering annuals, because snipping blooms just encourages more.”

Etienne remembers how his mother devoted one side of her vegetable garden to several rows of annuals, “which gave the garden a bit of beauty.” At his home, “everything gets planted together, including the vegetables growing right with the cannas and hydrangeas. I just go from spot to spot, cutting annuals, perennials, shrubs, tropicals, and

foliage from whatever. This way, you can have a substantial arrangement and never know you cut a thing when you look at your garden.”

Cutting gardens aren't just for people with acres of land out in the country, either. As documented in *The 50 Mile Bouquet*, for instance, Baylor Chapman of Lila B. Flowers in San Francisco grows hers in an asphalt parking lot in recycled 15-gallon nursery pots.

### **STEP 3: Harvest & Design**

When you cut your flowers, advises Miller, do it in the coolness of the morning so your picks don't wilt. Immediately “process” your plants after cutting, removing leaves from all but the last 6 to 8 inches at the top. Then get them immediately into a bucket of water.

Before you put your cuts in a container, make sure it's not a material that'll be damaged by water (i.e. silver, a tin can or crockery). If it is, try inserting a yogurt cup, cottage cheese container or plastic bag closed off by a twist tie.

If you want to hold your arrangement in place, Miller advises against using green floral foam. “Your flowers will last longer in water, especially if you add cut flower preservative.” You can buy “flower food” from your local florist or, if you're concerned about the formaldehyde (a carcinogen) that may be in the preservative (it's found in floral foam, too), [make your own “flower food”](#) with recipes from About.com Chemistry Guide Anne Marie Helmenstine. If you need to stabilize your flowers, you can do it with colored wire or with a cluster of grapevine stuffed into the container. “Adding some lemonade also extends the life of the water,” adds Tesselaar.

When it comes to style, Tesselaar says European designers often use as few as three – or just one – plant in an arrangement. And often, the container is just as important as the plant (to get an idea of the look, visit [www.scheurich.com](http://www.scheurich.com)). “Sometimes all it takes are a few stalks of one spectacular bloom in a vase, such as the sunburst-like spikes of [Bluestorm Agapanthus](#),” says Tesselaar.

In the U.S., Miller says it's all about individuality: “It's about what makes *you* happy.”

### **STEP 4: Share**

“The wonderful thing about cutting gardens,” says Tesselaar, “is that you'll have more than enough to share with family and friends.”

You can turn cut flowers and foliage into DIY gifts, suggests Jenkins. Or, as Tesselaar notes, you can join the growing number of people sharing images of their fresh-cut floral creations via social media like Pinterest, Facebook and Flickr.

But whether you enjoy them yourself or share them with others, cut botanicals have a way of brightening lives.

“Share those bunches with a neighbor that doesn't have a garden,” writes Prinzing in the introduction to *The 50 Mile Bouquet*. “Source fresh blooms from local flower growers in your own community, whether

you live in the town or country. And finally, learn how to design with confidence as you create personal, evocative bouquets of your own. It's a better way to beautiful."

### **Fact sheets**

[Flower Carpet roses](#)

[Volcano phlox](#)

[Storm series of agapanthus](#)

[Festival Burgundy cordyline](#)

[Tropicanna cannas](#)

### **Hi-res images**

[The 50 Mile Bouquet, book cover](#)

[Starburst spikes of Bluestorm agapanthus in dark blue vase](#)

[Bluestorm agapanthus, Flower Carpet roses, Tropicanna cannas, Burgundy Spire cordyline are great as cut flowers and foliage](#)

[Volcano Phlox, feverfew, hosta leaves in bouquet, cutting gardens in background](#)

[Mixed foliage arrangement with leaves from hibiscus, variegated mint, hostas and Tropicanna cannas](#)

[Flower Carpet roses, mixed colors as centerpiece](#)

### **About Tesselaar**

Tesselaar Plants searches the world and introduces new plants for the home garden, landscape, home décor and gift markets. Tesselaar undertakes extensive research and development of its varieties and, once they're selected for introduction, provides marketing and promotional support through its grower and retail network. The Tesselaar philosophy is to introduce exceptional plants while "making gardening easy" for everyone, so it makes its products as widely available as possible. Tesselaar believes the more gardeners there are, the better it is for everyone.

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***Editor's note: Other cutting garden/cut flower images are available via the [Image Library](#) on Tesselaar's online [Newsroom](#).***

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