**Birds, Bees, and Bouquets**

A garden of native flowers provides birds, bees and butterflies with pollen, nectar, fruit and seeds. Moreover, these same flowers and fruits can also be harvested judiciously for use in creating beautiful bouquets for the home.

Growing *native* plants is more important than ever before. Native plants have co-evolved with our wildlife and can best provide them with the food, habitat, and cover they require for survival. Many of our bees, butterflies, birds and mammals are declining as a result of lost habitat and the lack of nutritious food offered by native plants. Many animals, in fact, cannot survive on non-native flora and are, in effect, being starved by the widespread use of non-native cultivated plants in our gardens. Chickadees, for example, require 70% native vegetation if they are to nest successfully. On a global scale, the earth is on the brink of the 6th mass extinction.

At the same time we grow nutritious native plants for wildlife, we can also bring a few indoors to enjoy their beauty and fragrance up close. Plants will often bloom again after their first flowers are harvested, providing a fresh supply of pollen and nectar for pollinating insects. Shrubs benefit from pruning, as they usually flower and fruit on new young branches.

By planting native wildflowers, shrubs and trees, gardeners can enjoy indoor bouquets of gorgeous native wildflowers and, at the same time, insure that our native flora and fauna continue to grace their lives.

**Ten Best Native Plants for Fresh Cut Flowers**

1. Prairie Blazing Star  
   *Liatris pycnostachya*
2. Purple Coneflower & Pale Purple Coneflower  
   *Echinacea purpurea* and *Echinacea pallida*
3. Butterfly Milkweed  
   *Asclepias tuberosa*
4. Black-eyed Susan, Brown-eyed Susan and Sweet Black-eyed Susan  
   *Rudbeckia hirta*, *Rudbeckia triloba* and *Rudbeckia subtomentosa*
5. Foxglove Beard Tongue  
   *Penstemon digitalis*
6. Goldenrod  
   *Solidago* species
7. Aster  
   *Symphyotrichum (Aster)* species
8. Blue Wild Indigo  
   *Baptisia australis*
9. Sneezeweed or Helen’s Flower  
   *Helenium autumnale*
10. Yellow Coneflower  
    *Ratibida pinnata*
Five Best Vines for Fresh Floral Arrangements

1. Grape Vines  
   *Vitis* species
2. Virginia Creeper  
   *Parthenocissus quinquefolia*
3. American Bittersweet – can be used dried as well, with berries  
   *Celastrus scandens* (Be sure to avoid the invasive oriental bittersweet, *C. orbiculatus*)
4. Honeysuckle (vines only, not invasive shrubs)  
   *Lonicera* species
5. Wild Yam  
   *Dioscorea villosa*

Five Best Grasses for Fresh or Dried Arrangements

1. Side-oats Grama  
   *Bouteloua curtipendula*
2. Prairie Dropseed  
   *Sporobolus heteroleus*
3. Indian Grass  
   *Sorghastrum nutans*
4. Big Bluestem  
   *Andropogon gerardii*
5. Bottlebrush Grass  
   *Elymus hystrix (Hystrix patula)*

Tips on Harvesting & Care of Fresh Cut Flowers and Grasses

1. Clean tools, pails & vases.

2. Harvest early in the day (or at dusk).

   Instead, use distilled water, water from a dehumidifier or rainwater.

4. Floral Preservative: Many flowers do not do better with preservatives.  
   I recommend conditioning with distilled water with 1-teaspoon chlorine bleach per gallon to initially reduce bacteria, but recommend using only distilled water in the vase.
Ten Best Native Plants for Dried Seedheads

1. Yarrow  
   *Achillea millefolium*
2. White Sage  
   *Artemesia ludoviciana*
3. Milkweeds  
   *Asclepias* species
4. Wild Indigo  
   *Baptisia* species
5. Coneflower  
   *Echinacea* species and *Ratibida pinnata*
6. Rattlesnake master  
   *Eryngium yuccifolium*
7. Bittersweet  
   *Celastris scandens*
8. Rose hips  
   *Rosa* species
9. Compass Plant and Prairie Dock – leaves and seedheads  
   *Silphium laciniatum* and *Silphium terebinthinaceum*
10. Sweet Everlasting  
   *Gnaphalium obtusifolium*

Three Most Common Methods of Drying

Drying is not an exact science and some experimentation may be needed. I’ve used all three methods below successfully. If using one of the standing methods, only plants with sturdy stems should be used.

1. Hanging with stems bound with rubber band (stays tighter than string, as stems become thinner as they dry)
2. Standing in vase without water
3. Standing in 1½ - 2 inches of water; let water evaporate for 7-10 days

Sources of Native Plants

See dnr.wi.gov; search for “Native Plant Nurseries” and “Restoration Consultants”

Other sources:
   Ask local nature centers & chapters of Wild Ones: Native Plants, Natural Landscapes. They often have plant sales at which you can purchase native plants and also can provide information on local nurseries that carry native plants of excellent quality

Mariette Nowak, 2020  
Author, *Birdscaping in the Midwest*, University of Wisconsin Press, 2012