

Native Beauty

Flower Arranging with Native Plants

Why *Native* Cut Flowers?

Many native plants can be used as fresh cut flowers or as dried seedheads to create beautiful floral arrangements. In addition, a garden of native flowers and shrubs will bring bees, butterflies, and birds to your yard. Native plants have co-evolved with our native wildlife and can best provide them with the food, habitat, and cover they require for survival.

You can cut some flowers for your own use and share the rest with wildlife. Plants will often bloom again after their first flowers are harvested, providing a new supply of pollen and nectar for pollinating insects. Shrubs also benefit from pruning, as they usually flower and fruit on new young branches.

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. On a global scale, the earth is on the brink of the 6th mass extinction. By planting native wildflowers and trees, gardeners can enjoy indoor bouquets of gorgeous native wildflowers and, at the same time, insure that 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

Tips on Harvesting & Care of Fresh Cut Flowers and Grasses

1. Clean tools, pails & vases.
2. Harvest early in the day (or at dusk).
3. Water Quality: Avoid hard, softened and chlorinated water.
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
Artemisia 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

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)

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.

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