

Growing Flowers for Cutting

Factsheet 15/21

INTRODUCTION

Any large scale commercial growing of cut flowers in Ireland is currently confined to outdoor daffodil production with product being sold into supermarkets or exported to Dutch auctions. Generally, cut flower production is a relatively small scale enterprise practiced by a small number of growers who tend to grow for supply to local high street florists or farmers markets. However, the increase in availability of flower bouquets through supermarkets is driving interest in Irish grown cut flowers and recently, there has been expansion in the sector with areas of tulips and perennials such as Peonies being established commercially. There appears to be scope for more but thorough research of the market is advised before embarking on a cut flower enterprise. A large range of plants from trees and shrubs to annuals and bulbs can be grown for flowers and this means that they can be harvested for nearly 12 months of the year, particularly if some form of protection is available such as glasshouses or tunnels.

To be suitable for the commercial cut flower trade, flowers to be grown in the open should possess certain qualities.

- The most important is that they should last well. They should also take water readily when placed in vases.
- They must also be capable of being handled, packaged etc. without readily bruising breaking or shattering.
- They should be of consistent quality capable of good yields.
- Stems need to be of good length and must meet the market specification.

As you plan a schedule there are various things to consider:

- Aim to target 10 or more flowers in season at a time.
- Include rotation planning, avoiding planting by family to minimise disease and weed build up.
- Plant by harvest time to improve ease of harvest.
- Include cultivation approaches to help schedule plants ie. plants grown in pots or modules can be moved in/out of protection as the season requires it, helping you to extend the season where required. Chilling of bulbs or corms (e.g. Gladioli) and successive plantings can give a good spread of flowers. Cutting back perennials between May and June can be suitable for many flower types such as *Helianthus* and *Echinacea* which can push back flowering to encourage side shoot development and will have a bigger effect the closer you come to flowering.

It is advised to think carefully about what to grow and what will fit with your existing market and growing facilities. Some flowers are best left to the importers ie: roses, carnations, chrysanthemum, lilies and should be avoided. These can be purchased wholesale through the Dutch auction system and can be ordered for weekly deliveries to supplement whatever you can grow. Given below are a range of typical cut flower species, with guidance on flowering times to help you plan for year-round production.

ANNUAL FLOWERS FROM SEED

Flowers grown from seed especially annuals can be easy and cheap to grow. Most crops are short term and can be sown several times over the season to help continuity of supply by sowing or planting every 3-4 weeks including the spring and autumn periods. For best results these should be sown under good conditions such as under plastic or glass with multiple seeds sown into modules to allow the plants to grow into a ready-made bunch. Optimal temperatures will ensure good germination and give good early growth. As well as cut flowers, module-raised plants can be sold as an ornamental product alongside other young modules such as vegetables. Target spacing of around 30x30cm can be used as a general guide. Tall plants will need net supports in most cases, sunflowers are usually self-supporting but sweet peas will need a frame or canes to support. If sowing in modular trays use a module filling compost. For most plants optimal germination is around 20°C and a small heated cabinet can come in useful as quick germination is required, but plants can be grown in cold tunnels if fleece is available to combat spring frosts in April and May.

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Sunflower (L) is a popular annual cut flower and Helichrysum (R) can be cut fresh and as also used as a dried flower.

SPECIES	SOWING PERIOD	HARVEST PERIOD
<i>ACHILLEA</i>	JAN-JUL	JUNE
<i>ANTIRRHINUM</i>	JAN FEB	MAY
<i>AQUILEGIA</i>	APRIL-JUN OR SEPT	APRIL
<i>ASTER (ANNUAL)</i>	FEB-APRIL	JULY
<i>BRASSICA (ORNAMENTAL)</i>	JULY - AUG	NOV - FEB
<i>BUPLEURUM</i>	MARCH – JULY	JUNE - OCT
<i>CALENDULA</i>	SEPT OR MARCH	APRIL
<i>CARTHAMUS</i>	APRIL –JUNE	JULY
<i>CHRYSANTHEMUM</i>	MARCH-MAY	SEPT - NOV
CORNFLOWER	MARCH ONWARDS	JUNE - AUG
COSMOS	MARCH	JUNE - SEPT
DAHLIA	MAY	JULY
<i>GYPSOPHILA</i>	FEB ONWARDS	MAY - SEPT
<i>HELENIUM</i>	MARCH - MAY	JUNE - OCT
<i>HELICHRYSUM</i>	MARCH ONWARDS	JUNE - SEPT
<i>LARKSPUR</i>	AUG/SEPT OR FEB	JULY
<i>MOLUCELLA</i>	APRIL	AUG
<i>NIGELLA</i>	FEB	MAY
<i>RUDBECKIA</i>	MARCH	JULY
<i>STATICE</i>	FEB	JULY
STOCKS (P)	NOV OR MAY/JUNE	MAY
SUNFLOWERS	MARCH -JUNE	JUNE - OCT
SWEET PEAS	NOV & MARCH	JUNE - AUG
SWEET WILLIAM	JULY AUG	MAY/JUNE
<i>WALLFLOWER</i>	JUNE	APRIL
<i>ZINNIA</i>	APRIL	AUG

Key

SEEDED MODULES	BOUGHT IN PLUG PLANTS	BOUGHT IN TUBERS	DIRECT DRILLED
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PERENNIAL CUT FLOWERS

Perennials will need semi-permanent beds as they will crop for two or more years and some can continue flowering for up to 10-12 years. These can be initially planted October/November or February/March. Most species are self-supporting although some will require lifting and splitting periodically especially if the flower numbers are reducing. Spacing is more variable with perennials and taller plants like Peonies will need more space but can remain planted for many years. There are a number of perennials that are not considered traditional cut flowers but may be attractive to your customers so worth trying on a small scale to test the market.

CROP	HARVEST	HEIGHT (CM)	COLOUR	LONGEVITY (YR)
<i>ACHILLEA</i>	JUNE-AUG	90	YELLOW/WHITE	3
<i>ALSTROMERIA</i>	JUNE -SEPT	90-120	VARIOUS	3+
<i>ASTER</i>	AUG-OCT	80-120	PINK/BLUE	4+
<i>CAMPANULA</i>	JUN-AUG	90	BLUE	3
<i>CHRYSANTHEMUM</i>	JUNE - AUG	50	VARIOUS	3
<i>DELPHINIUM</i>	JUNE – MID JULY	120	BLUE/PINK/WHITE	3
<i>ECHINACEA</i>	JULY AUG	90	WHITE	2
<i>ERYNGIUM</i>	JULY - SEPT	60	BLUE	4+
<i>HELENIUM</i>	JUNE-OCT	90	YELLOW/ORANGE	2
<i>HELIANTHUS</i>	AUG/SEPT	150	YELLOW	5
<i>LIATRUS</i>	LATE AUG - OCT	120	BLUE	3
<i>PAEONIA</i>	MAY-JUNE	90	VARIOUS	20
<i>PHLOX</i>	JULY SEPT	80	PINK/PURPLE	3
<i>PINKS</i>	JUNE OCT	35	PINK	2
<i>SCABIOSA</i>	JUNE-OCT	80	BLUE	2
<i>SEDUM</i>	SEPT-OCT	40	PINK/PURPLE	4+
<i>SOLIDAGO</i>	JULY - AUG	65	YELLOW	4



Field production of perennial cut flower species Solidago (L) and Sedum (R).

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FLOWERING SHRUBS AND FOLIAGE

A number of deciduous and evergreen shrubs can provide a wealth of flowers and in some cases berries while foliage can be useful for in mixed bunches as a filler or in making arrangements.

CROP	FLOWERING TIME	STEM LENGTH (CM)	FLOWER OR FOLIAGE
CAMELIA	JAN - MAR	200	FLOWER/FOLIAGE
ERICA	WINTER/SPRING	150	FLOWER/FOLIAGE
<i>EUCALYPTUS</i>	ALL YEAR	1000	FOLIAGE
<i>FORSYTHIA</i>	MARCH/APRIL	200	FLOWER
<i>HYDRANGEA</i>	JULY - SEPT	200	FLOWER/FOLIAGE
<i>HYPERICUM</i>	JUNE- OCT	200	BERRIES
LAVENDER	JUNE-SEPT	30	FLOWER
LILAC	MAY	200	FLOWER
<i>OZOTHAMNUS</i>	ALL YEAR	200	FOLIAGE/FLOWER
<i>PITTOSPORUM</i>	ALL YEAR	200	FOLIAGE
PRUNUS (LAUREL)	ALL YEAR	200	FOLIAGE
ROSES	JUNE-OCT	150	FLOWER
ROSE HIPS	OCT - NOV	150	BERRIES
SPIREA	SPRING	200	FLOWERS
<i>VIBURNUM</i>	ALL YEAR	150	FOLIAGE/FLOWER
<i>WEIGLA</i>	SEPT-OCT	150	FOLIAGE



Rose hips are used in flower arrangements and bouquets in late Autumn.



Shrubs that can be useful for both foliage and flowers include *Erica* and *Ozothamnus*.

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FLOWERING BULBS AND CORMS

Bulbs and corms can be a very useful group as they flower outside of the usual flower seasons and help keep a supply to customers. Some will be perennial while others are best treated as annuals. Lilies and gladioli can be planted in sequence to extend the cutting season. Daffodils can be marketed can also be sold as flowering live products for longer term display.

CROP	FLOWERING TIME	COLOUR	STEM LENGTH (CM)
<i>ALLIUM</i>	MAY JUNE	PINK/BLUE	100
ANEMONE DE CAEN	APRIL MAY (MILD AREAS)	RED/BLUE	25
CAMASSIA	MAY JUNE	BLUE	120
DAFFODILS	NOV TO MAY	YELLOW	60
DUTCH IRIS	MAY/JUNE	VARIOUS	60
GLADIOLI	JULY - SEPT	VARIOUS	100
LILY OF THE VALLEY	MAY	WHITE	30
LILIES	JULY OCT	VARIOUS	100+
NERINE LILY	SEPT/OCT	PINK	50
'PAPER WHITE' NARCISSUS	NOW/DEC	WHITE	60
<i>TRITELIA</i>	JUNE	BLUE	30
TULIPS	MARCH TO MAY	VARIOUS	35

FURTHER INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE AT THE FOLLOWING LINKS:

https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/crops/horticulture/cut-foliage/1_20-Cut-Foliage-Production-.pdf

https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/crops/horticulture/cut-foliage/16_20-Annuals--Biennials-for-Cut-Flower-Production.pdf

https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/crops/horticulture/cut-foliage/17_20-Perennials-for-Cut-Flower-Production.pdf

https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/crops/horticulture/cut-foliage/23_20-Cut-Flower-Seeds--Young-Plant-Suppliers.pdf