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# So You Think You Want to Grow Cutflowers...

*10 Questions Every Wannabe Should  
Consider*

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Pam Rye

Area Farm Management Specialist

Tennessee State University

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# Top Questions

- ❖ What is a cutflower?
  - ❖ What makes a good cutflower?
  - ❖ Why grow cutflowers?
  - ❖ What are the general growing requirements?
  - ❖ How can I extend my season?
  - ❖ How do I harvest & store my crop?
  - ❖ How should I market my flowers?
  - ❖ How can I differentiate from competitors?
  - ❖ How should I price my flowers?
  - ❖ What types can I grow successfully in Tennessee?
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# What is a Cutflower?

- ❖ Includes plant material both fresh, dried, preserved.
  - ❖ Buds, flowers, stems, branches, seed heads, stalks, etc
  - ❖ Any part used for floral or decorative purposes
  - ❖ The number and diversity of available crops are virtually limitless.
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# What Makes a Good Cutflower?

- ❖ Long Vase Life or Dries Well
- ❖ Good Color, retention
- ❖ Stem length (min 18")
- ❖ Large # of stems
- ❖ Where blooms are located on stem
- ❖ Long harvest time
- ❖ Low production cost
- ❖ Grows well in your location
- ❖ Few Pests



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# Why Grow Cutflowers?

## ❖ Correct Answers:

- ❖ Low land and equipment requirements
- ❖ Additional income
- ❖ Fills slow cash-flow gap in summer
- ❖ Diverse product base
- ❖ High Demand : Few Growers

## ❖ Wrong Answer:

- ❖ It's Romantic. BEWARE!!!! Reality is labor and time intensive!
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# What are the General Growing Requirements?

- ❖ Site Selection
- ❖ Bed Preparation
- ❖ Weed Control
- ❖ Water
- ❖ Fertilizer
- ❖ Plant Selection
- ❖ Labor



# Site Selection

## ❖ Physical Location

- ❖ Market, labor, etc
- ❖ Water availability
- ❖ Avoid windy areas
- ❖ Expansion

## ❖ Soil Properties

- ❖ Level, Well drained
- ❖ Avoid heavy clay or sand



## ❖ Sunlight

- ❖ FULL SUN, ~ 8 -10 hours
- ❖ SUN = BLOOMS = \$\$\$

# Site Selection

- ❖ Start Small

  - ❖ ½ acre

  - ❖ Big is 2 acres +

- ❖ Labor intensive!

- ❖ Marketing takes more effort than producing

- ❖ Leave Room for Expansion



# Bed Preparation



- ❖ Soil test, adjust pH
- ❖ Organic matter
- ❖ Cover crops
- ❖ Control weeds
- ❖ Lime, etc
- ❖ Field Rotation/Crop Rotation

# Bed Preparation



- ❖ Till 18 – 24"
- ❖ Cover crops: Cool season; hairy vetch, rye, barley, and crimson clover; Warm season; soybeans, cowpeas, buckwheat
- ❖ Raised beds, 4-8" deep
- ❖ 4-8' across, reachability
- ❖ 2-3' between rows
- ❖ Any length

# Water & Fertilizer



*Good, drip application*

- ❖ Water
  - ❖ 1-1.5" week
- ❖ No overhead irrigation
  - ❖ Drip
- ❖ Fertilizer
  - ❖ OM, cover crop
  - ❖ Pre-plant incorporated (lime, superphosphate)
  - ❖ Slow release encapsulated
  - ❖ Fertigation

# Weed Control

- ❖ Germination coincides with crop
- ❖ Herbicides
  - ❖ Limited
- ❖ Stale seedbed
- ❖ Plasticulture
  - ❖ Pre-form beds
  - ❖ Warm faster
  - ❖ Earlier planting = earlier crop = market advantage



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# Other Pest Notes

## ❖ Wet Seasons

❖ Slugs

❖ Aphids

❖ Botrytis

❖ Root rots (*pythium*,  
*rhizoctonia*)

❖ Powdery mildew

## ❖ Hot, Dry Seasons

❖ Grasshoppers

❖ Thrips

❖ Spider mites

❖ Japanese Beetle

*Wildlife ????*

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# Plant Selection

- ❖ Form
- ❖ Texture
- ❖ COLOR
- ❖ Multiple  
Functions/Attributes
- ❖ Drought Tolerance
- ❖ Heat/Cold Tolerance



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# Plant Selection

## ❖ ANNUALS

- ❖ Direct Seed or Plugs
- ❖ Multiple sowings
- ❖ Harvest frequently
- ❖ Higher irrigation/fertilization needs

## ❖ PERENNIALS

- ❖ Plugs
  - ❖ One Planting
  - ❖ Division
  - ❖ Concentrated Harvest
  - ❖ Lower irrigation/fertility after establishment
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# Other Plant Notes

## ❖ Staking/Support:

- ❖ Tall or top-heavy species
  - ❖ Use adjustable wire or plastic netting that can be raised as plants mature. Be sure the netting and supports are in place before the plants get too tall. It's extremely difficult to "retrofit" support without damaging the plants.
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# Labor

- ❖ Growing, packaging, marketing
- ❖ Harvest time is busiest
- ❖ Take time to train on expectations



# How Can I Extending the Growing Season?

- ❖ Growing/forcing bulbs
- ❖ Stagger plantings
- ❖ Use “Color of the Moment” day, season, etc (cool colors during late spring, warm colors in fall)
- ❖ Continuous production of ‘fillers’
- ❖ Plasticulture
- ❖ Hoop house/High Tunnels
- ❖ Greenhouse



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# How Do I Harvest My Crop?

- ❖ Early morning. Cool, but dew is evaporated: less stress, fewer pathogens.
  - ❖ Keep shaded
  - ❖ In water if fresh, hang upside down if drying, etc.
  - ❖ Harvesting at the proper stage of development for each species is very important. Too early, and some species may not open; too late can result in drastically reduced vase life.
  - ❖ Keep implements sharp & sanitized.
  - ❖ Cut and Grade in 1 motion: prevents excess handling
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# How Do I Store My Crop? :

## Post-harvest Tips

- ❖ Crop specific
  - ❖ DO NOT store with fruits & veggies
    - ❖ Ethylene promotes senescence
      - ❖ Good ventilation and remove dying tissue
  - ❖ Cool water to cool stems. Warm water is useful if the cuts are under extreme water stress. Monitor water pH - acidic water (pH 3.0 to 5.5) inhibits bacterial growth helping flowers persist longer. Preservatives are also formulated to be effective at lower pH.
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# Post-harvest: Transport & Delivery

- ❖ Deliver straight from field
  - ❖ Otherwise cold storage needed
  - ❖ Refrigerated trucks
- ❖ The indispensable 5 gallon bucket!
  - ❖ Boxes, buckets, hold wet or dry



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# How Should I Market My Cutflowers?

## ❖ Inter-related Factors

- ❖ Product

- ❖ Promotion

- ❖ Place

- ❖ Price

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# Marketing Considerations

- ❖ Direct or Fresh Market
  - ❖ PYO Bouquets
- ❖ Fresh vs. Dried
- ❖ Upscale Restaurants & Grocers
- ❖ Ethnic considerations/location
  - ❖ Mediterranean, Arabic, Indian, Asian, European
- ❖ Local, Native, Pesticide Free, Free, Discounted, or Monthly Contract Deliveries



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# Marketing Considerations

## ❖ Grow What the Market Wants

- ❖ Remember: Can't compete with CA, S.America, etc
  - ❖ Roses, Carnations, Easter lilies, etc.

## ❖ Growing What Doesn't Ship Well: LOCAL QUALITY

- ❖ Snaps & Glads bend if not upright, Zinnias look less full or crushed.
  - ❖ Short Vase Life types: Sweet Peas and Snapdragons.
  - ❖ Big, heavy sunflowers, are expensive to ship out of state.
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# How Do I Differentiate from Competitors?

- ❖ Look at competition's strengths & weaknesses
  - ❖ Make your merchandising unique or superior
  - ❖ Educate your buyer
    - ❖ Provide price lists
    - ❖ Quantities available
    - ❖ Descriptions of the material
      - ❖ Very important with new/unusual plants
    - ❖ Post-harvest recommendations, etc
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# Market Differentiation

- ❖ Provide Quality & Quantity
  - ❖ Service & Product
- ❖ Add New Varieties to the Mix
  - ❖ But don't bet the farm!
- ❖ Choose Double-duty Plants
  - ❖ Fresh, dried, wildlife, edible, heirloom, fragrant, native



# How Should I Price My Flowers?

- ❖ \$ by BUNCH is standard
- ❖ Differs by market type
- ❖ Use one consistent factor in pricing
  - ❖ the same number of stems per bunch regardless of species at same price
  - ❖ same price per bunch but vary the number of stems (large assortment of material)
  - ❖ Per stem



# E.g., Sunflower

- ❖ Great Local Sale b/c Expensive to ship
- ❖ Often sold per stem vs bunch
  - ❖ Retail: \$3-5 per stem
  - ❖ Other types \$3-5 per bunch



# What Types Can I Grow Successfully in Tennessee?



- ❖ Woodland Plants
- ❖ Bridal Specialties
- ❖ Dried
- ❖ Pods, Vines
- ❖ Grains, Grasses
- ❖ Shrubs
- ❖ Edibles
- ❖ Easy to Grow

# Woodland Plants



*Lily of the Valley*



*Bleeding Heart*

# Bridal Specialties

- ❖ Peonies
- ❖ Lily of the Valley
- ❖ Hydrangea



# Dried

- ❖ Lunaria
- ❖ Celosia
- ❖ Strawflower



# Vines, Pods, etc



*Hyacinth Bean*



*Honeysuckle*



2002, Nova-Photo-Graphik, Vieruna

# Grasses & Grains

- ❖ Seed heads
- ❖ Stems



*Red  
Fountain  
Grass*



*Purple Milo*



*Miscanthus &  
Pampas*

# Shrubs



*Hydrangeas*



*Cotoneasters*

# Shrubs

- ❖ Berries
- ❖ Interesting Bark



*Red & Yellow  
Twig  
Dogwood*



*Nandina*

# Edibles



*Pansies &  
Violas*



*Nasturtium*



*Herbs*

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# Other Easy To Grow & Market Cutflowers

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# Amaranth



- ❖ The Towers: Green or Red
- ❖ Fresh or dried
- ❖ Spiky, striking
- ❖ Heat/drought tolerant
- ❖ Direct Sow

# Asclepias & Buddelia

- ❖ Heat tolerant
- ❖ Bloom May to October



# Sunflower

- ❖ High demand
- ❖ Expensive to ship
- ❖ 5-12" spacing in field
- ❖ Heavy Feeders
  - ❖ Many Great Varieties:  
Chianti, Valentine, Ring  
of Fire...



# Zinnia

- ❖ Thicker stems
- ❖ Self branching
- ❖ Powdery mildew resistance
  - ❖ Benary's
  - ❖ Oklahoma



# Allium

- ❖ Perennial bulb
- ❖ Pest free
- ❖ Also some appeal to chefs
- ❖ 2 wk Vase Life
- ❖ Many varieties



# Gladiolus

- ❖ Adequate moisture
- ❖ Plant successively
- ❖ Store upright
- ❖ Rainbow of colors



# Narcissus

- ❖ Force for earlier bloom
- ❖ Don't put in water with other varieties
- ❖ Latex will clog



# Other Florist Favorites



*Campanula*



*Baby's Breath*

# Final Tips for Success

❖ “Failing to Plan is Planning to Fail”

- ❖ Start Small, Grow with Demand
- ❖ Keep Costs Low
- ❖ Unique Marketing Channels
- ❖ Listen to Consumers
- ❖ Differentiate Product
- ❖ Provide Exceptional Quality & Service

