

GROWING SPECIALTY CUT FLOWERS IN NEW ENGLAND

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I have been growing cut flowers for 19 years and have developed some favorite annuals that create a “wow” factor in my bouquets and arrangements that I will share with you.

LISIANTHUS is a stunning annual that I describe as a look alike between a rose and a tulip. You can dress it up or dress it down so it fits well in all types of bouquets. I have been growing them for 9 years and they have never failed me. Since they take about a month to germinate and are extremely slow growers, I buy them in as 125 or 210 plug trays. They are grown in raised beds in my greenhouse starting mid-March.

They don't start blooming till late July but continue thru September, and there are always a few stragglers I get cuts off of in October. I tried to winter them over using a lot of mulch during one mild season but found they had fungal disease problems in the spring. The two series I like the best for Maine growing are Mariachi and Echo and my favorite colors are yellow, purple, lavender and green. They come in other colors like white, lite pink to a darker one called carmine and also come in interesting bi-color series called picotee and misty. I only grow the double petal ones.

I grow them in well-drained soil with a little fresh compost mixed in every year.

They don't like to be dried out and as they reach maturity between 18- 30 inches, more water is needed. Staking is necessary even in the greenhouse.

Lisianthus lasts a good 3 weeks in a vase after being cut. I use them in my wedding bouquets, corsages and boutonnieres and sell them to florists.

DAHLIAS are another stunning annual I grow from either tubers or stem cuttings that I buy every year. They come in different sizes, colors, and petal shapes. I grow the Karma and decorative series. They are grown in black crates in the greenhouse in early April then in May transferred to a hoop house for the rest of the growing cycle. I plant 5 tubers per crate in about 8 inches of soil, which is a mix of organic potting soil w/ a shovelful of compost mixed in. Thoroughly water them after planting but not much more till you see growth appearing. When the stems are about 5” tall, I pinch the tips to create side branches.

Dahlias start blooming for me, around mid-July but definitely peak in August and September. As long as I cover them during a hard frost, I still can get some blooms in October. After cutting them, condition them in warm water because they are hollow stemmed. I usually expect them to last 4-7 days once cut. I use them in wedding bouquet work but avoid using them in arrangements requiring oasis because they don't hold up as well.

SNAPDRAGONS are a staple in our bouquets. They are the earliest annuals on the farm to bloom so we usually grow between 250 & 300 plants. We grow three varieties, which include rocket series, greenhouse forcing, and azalea.

Rocket series is one of the standard choices for field grown snaps. It comes in a mix of 10 colors. In June and early July, we get hundreds of blooms and as long as you give them lots of water, they will produce well throughout the summer into fall. If you don't hydrate them well, they will produce very little in August and can give you a small to medium reblooming in the fall as the cooler weather sets in. Water, water, water is the key to continual flowering. We plant our snaps as early as May 1 depending on the weather. We use drip irrigation, black plastic and cover them with row cover.

If you sell to florists or need tall snaps for your arrangements, grow greenhouse-forcing snaps. They come in single color choices and we grow dark orange, red, yellow and pink. Stem length varies from 24-32". We use snaps mostly in our weekly bouquets and wedding centerpiece work. We have only found azalea type snaps in two colors, pink and peach. They are a shorter version, closer to the size of rockets or shorter. Blossoms are larger and slightly ruffed and make a fun addition to any bouquet.

KISS-ME-OVER-THE-GARDEN-GATE (*Polygonum orientale*) is a fun annual that makes our arrangements stand out. It is a hot pink color. It is challenging to germinate but once you grow it, it happily reseeds for you. It needs a pre-chill period of about 3 weeks in the refrigerator, and then it is helpful to nick the seed coat before planting. Germination ranges from 2 weeks to 2 months.

It grows in any kind of soil reaching a height of 4 to 8 feet. We wait till the flowers mature before cutting so they don't wilt. It branches out well so one plant can give you quite a few stems. We use it in our weekly bouquets.

CRASPEDIA, Drumstick Flower, is a unique golden yellow globe shape annual. It can be used fresh or dried. It has a long growing period so we seed it up in late February or early March. It likes to be grown on the dry side in the seedling stage. It can tolerate heat and dry conditions grown outside.

The one-inch balls, often referred to as billy balls, makes for a unique addition in any bouquet.