Some Tips On Harvesting Cut Flowers

by Allan Armitage
The University of Georgia

Time to Harvest

The best time to harvest flowers is a compromise between various factors. Harvesting in the morning is beneficial because plants are stiff and turgid, but they also may be wet with dew and more susceptible to post harvest diseases. Cutting in the late afternoon or evening provides stems with high carbohydrate levels, however temperatures may be too warm at the time the cutting crew is on the job. To avoid high temperatures in some parts of the country, they would have to cut at 8:00 at night. High natural sugars in the stem are not terribly important if stems are placed directly in a floral preservative containing sugar. Morning is recommended for flowers which lose water rapidly after harvesting. Transfer them immediately to a floral preservative and then to cool storage to prevent water loss. Harvesting, however, should be delayed until plants are dry of dew, rain or other moisture. Cutting at high temperatures and high light intensity should be avoided whenever possible.

Stage of Flower Development at Harvest

Flowers are more likely to look fresh for a longer period of time if harvested at the proper stage of development. The optimum stage depends on species, cultivar, season and distance to the marketplace. Flowers for direct sale are harvested at a later stage than those destined for distant markets. The following list provides some information on a few species used for direct or short distance sales. Information from our research program Nowak and Rudnicki (1) and Vaughan (2).

Botanical name	Common name	Stage
Achillea filipendulina	Fern-leaf yarrow	Fully open
Allium giganteum	Giant onion	30%open
Anemone coronaria	Poppy anemone	Buds beginning to open
Aquilegia hybrids	Columbine	50% open
Astilbe hybrids	Astilbe	50% open
Callistephus chinensis	Annual aster	Fully open
Campanula persicifolia	Peach bellflower	50% open
Celosia argentea	Celosia	50% open
Centaurea moschata	Sweet sultan	Flowers beginning to open
Consolida ambigua	Larkspur	2-5 flowers open
Crocosmia spp.	Crocosmia	50% open
Digitalis purpurea	Foxglove	50% open
Echinops ritro	Globe thistle	50% open
Eryngium spp.	Sea holly	Fully open
Eustoma grandiflorum	Eustoma,lisianthus	5-6 open
Iris germanica	Bearded iris	Buds colored
Lilium spp.	Lily	Buds colored
Limonium sinuatum	Annual statice	70% open
Ornith. thrysoides	Chincherinchee	Buds colored
Phlox paniculata	Summer phlox	50% open
Polianthes tuberosa	Tuberose	80% open
Scabiosa caucasica	Scabious	50% open
Zinnia elegans	Zinnia	Fully open

1. Nowak, J. and Rudnicki, R. M. 1990. Postharvest handling and storage of cut flowers, florist greens and potted plants. Timber Press, Portland, OR.

2. Vaughan, M. J. 1988. The complete book of cut flower care. Timber Press, Portland, OR.