

# SOME TIPS ON HARVESTING CUT FLOWERS

Allan Armitage  
University of Georgia

Reprinted from the Georgia Commercial Flower Growers Newsletter Vol. 3, No. 2

## 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).

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.

The best time to harvest flowers is a compromise between various factors.

High natural sugars in the stem are not terribly important if stems are placed directly in a floral preservative containing sugar.

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

Cutting at high temperatures and high light intensity should be avoided whenever possible.

Flowers are more likely to look fresh for a longer period of time if harvested at the proper stage of development.