

Fall Flowers For Autumn Color

Many gardeners extend their fall gardens by using the staples of an autumn garden; goldenrod, aster, chrysanthemum, and black-eyed Susan's. These flowers are often encouraged to grow more compact and bushy by cutting them back in early summer.

Also consider perennials with colorful and attractive foliage. While lots of attention is given to fall foliage in ornamental shrubs or colorful fall trees, these perennial plants also have attractive foliage for autumn beds and containers:

- Coral Bells (Heuchera) – Known for their dramatic foliage color and add a real splash of color to a fall bed. Size ranges from a few inches tall to about 2 feet tall with tall flower cluster spikes. The foliage is the most dramatic feature and is often variegated with colorful splashes and splotches, or veining in the leaves. Leaves can be anything from lime green, to dark purple-black and everything in between with tones of peaches, orange, red, green, white and silver.
- Ivy – A popular ground cover year-round, but it also makes for a fabulous choice for fall borders and containers. Ivy is available with white and green variegation. However, please remember that common English Ivy is invasive in our area.

Grasses can go from background or filler plants to shining accent pieces with the cool fall weather. Many ornamental grasses have attractive seed heads that catch the wind so nicely during the cool autumn weather. Some of the ornamental grasses that bloom in September include; Red-Head fountain grass, most Maiden grasses, and Dallas Blue switch grass. Even a few ornamental grasses in the fall garden can create a rainbow of color as the red fountain grass picks up the fall foliage colors in shrubs and trees around it. Maiden grasses are available in a variety of greens, yellows and variegated colors. And the switch grass gives a darker backdrop for brighter colors, letting them glow in the long fall light.

There are also cool season annuals that bloom in spring and fall but don't take the heat of summer as well. Here are five favorites that are nice for indoor cut flower arrangements:

- Blue Lace Flower – Huge clusters of delicate purple-blue flowers on 2' stems make this flowering plant one of the most beautiful cute flower annuals. Well-drained soil is needed and full sun to part shade. In hot or humid summers the plant may stop blooming so start indoors six weeks before the last frost date to get a head start on the growing season. Blue lace flower will last in a vase in a week.
- Calendula – An easy to grow, cool season annual historically used in teas and herbal remedies that also boasts bright yellow or red flowers. Calendula blooms

best in cooler weather, so don't be surprised if the flowers fade as summer heats up. Average, well-drained soil is best and calendula will tolerate full sun to part shade. Start calendula plants indoors a few weeks before the last frost date or purchase bedding containers to set out as soon as the ground thaws. Excellent varieties for cutting flowers include 'Prince', with large flowers on 12 to 18 inch stems, 'Pacific' hybrids and the 'Touch of Red' calendulas which have red tinged petals. Cut calendula flowers when the blooms are almost fully open and re-cut stems under water for flowers that last nearly a week in the vase.

- Sweet Pea – The fragile looking flowers of the sweet pea vine are actually long-lasting, fragrant and colorful making them excellent choices for cut flower plants. Sweet pea plants grow as a vine 5 to 6 feet tall up a pole, fence or trellis and prefer full sun and average, well-drained soil. Cut the red, pink, purple or white pea flowers just as the blooms open and they will last about a week in the vase. Unlike other pea varieties, sweet pea seeds are not edible. Varieties with long stems or fragrant flowers good for cutting are 'Old Spice', 'Painted Lady', 'Winter Elegance', 'Mammoth', and 'Royal Family'.
- Pansy – Long one of the first flower plants to show its cheerful blooms in the spring. Pansy cultivars are now so hardy that you can put them out in the fall and enjoy the cool season blooms all winter. Rich to average well-drained soil is preferred by pansies and good sun is best but part shade is tolerated. Most will die back in the heat of summer so just select the pansy bedding plants with the colors you like best. Cut the long stems to add an arrangement or lift part of the plant and put in a small dish for long-lasting indoor display.
- Pincushion Flower – Sweet fragrance and fluffy pincushion-shaped flowers make this cool-season annual a joy for cut flower gardeners. Rich soil in full sun is best for the scented Scabiosa but part shade in the heat of summer can help extend the blooms. Pincushion flowers are blue, lavender, white or pink and highly attractive to butterflies. These cut flowers from on 2' stems that may require staking. Start seeds in late winter or early spring in biodegradable pots to avoid transplant stress but still get the longest growing season for the cool weather annuals. 'Imperial Mix' Scabiosa has a nice range of colors and the 'variety' 'Drumstick' is prized as a dried flower also.