



CUT ORNAMENTAL

Floral Design Materials

South Mississippi

There are many exciting, creative, and income-enhancing possibilities for those who enjoy growing and working with flowers. For the **floriculture enthusiast**, planting seeds, nurturing plants to the flowering phase, and harvesting flowers to create an arrangement is a gratifying process that mirrors the beauty of life.

Floral design is a fun and creative way to express individual style. People enjoy making floral arrangements, especially from locally grown flowers and foliage, which often last longer than flowers shipped from other countries. A long-lasting floral design is important to consumers looking to extend the amount of time cut materials can be displayed.

For those thinking about starting a **flower farm**, owning your own floriculture enterprise can be both rewarding and profitable. Spurred on by the new flower-farm movement, some Mississippians may give growing flowers a chance. Our state would benefit from more flower farms, and research suggests that Mississippians would prefer to purchase flowers grown in our state if they were available. Successful flower farms can generate from \$25,000 to \$60,000 per acre in sales each year.

A 2013 survey found that there were approximately 6,000 growers of floriculture crops in the United States. In 2016, the wholesale value of domestically grown cut flowers was \$374 million; about three-fourths of this crop was produced in California. Domestic cut-foliage production wholesale value is about \$80 million, with three-fourths of the crop grown in Florida. Mississippi's current production is small, but we have great potential, with assets including available land, long growing seasons, and water availability.

Although freshly cut flowers are beautiful and desirable, the actual growing process can present challenges. Flower farming is a tough and risky enterprise. You must consider many factors, including soil fertility, irrigation water access/quality, weather, fertilizers, appropriate varieties, harvesting techniques, post-harvest care, and consumer perceptions. Successful flower farmers grow plant materials that offer the best returns on labor and expense.



There are many possibilities for those who grow, arrange, and sell cut ornamental flowers, berries, and greenery. Don't forget about the ornamental foliage used in floral design. Designers in the South like to augment commercially grown flowers with local foliage to give their arrangements regional flavor. It is possible to grow cut flowers and greenery for bulk sales; designing and creating wreaths, swags, and finished floral arrangements will add value to wholesale or retail operations.

This publication provides a brief list of plant materials that look beautiful in floral design *and* thrive with the least amount of care in southern Mississippi flower gardens. The plant materials listed have been selected for different reasons, including:

- ease of culture (water, pruning),
- design appeal,
- ability to withstand substantial harvesting, and
- capacity to stay established for many years.

In floral design, plant materials are classified according to their natural pattern or outline. Some materials are round, while others are spiky. The traditional four classifications are line, mass, filler, and form.

A dominant directional flow can be seen in **line materials**, whether the line is upright (gladiolus, liatris), curving (corkscrew willow, tulip), or hanging (amaranthus, grapes).

Traditional **mass flowers** include sunflowers, carnations, peonies, and other flowers that are full and rounded. Flower farmers grow **filler materials** such as *Ammi* (Queen Anne's lace), *Alchemilla* (lady's mantle), *Artemisia*, *Bu-plerum*, and many others.

Some floral materials stand out from the others due to their unusual, distinctive patterns—these are **form materials**. Dutch irises, gloriosa lilies, and pitcher plants may be considered form materials.

Some ornamental materials exude milky saps that can irritate the skin and eyes. Keep pets and children away from cut floral materials.

Suggested Plant Material



Glossy Abelia
Abelia x grandiflora

Grow this plant for its arching branches and interesting flower parts. It is beautiful without its small, white, trumpet-shaped flowers because their bronze calyces remain. Can be sold as a cut flower or cut foliage, and as a line or filler material. Harvest stems at lengths from 12 to 48 inches.



Maple
Acer sp.

Stems of Japanese maples and autumn-colored sugar maples add flair to floral designs. Vase life is only a few days before leaves curl and dry, but its color and pattern accent in floral designs is distinctive. Great candidate for pressed floral pictures. Cut stems around 24 inches long, and avoid harvesting stems with soft, juvenile growth in the spring.



Okra
Abelmoschus esculentus

Fresh or dried okra on the stem is terrific in floral designs. The individual dried pods are great for a rustic touch in designs, including tabletop arrangements, wreaths, and many more.



Yarrow
Achillea sp.

Versatile cut flower, fresh or dried, on strong stems. Cottage yarrow is available in a wide range of hues, including crimson and pastels like peach and pink. It is best used as a filler in floral bouquets and arrangements.



Lily of the Nile
Agapanthus africanus

The flower structure is suitable before or after all florets abscise. Remaining green stems can be painted or glittered either in a fresh state or dried.



Butterfly Weed
Asclepias sp.

These are orange or golden, depending on variety, and serve as a pop of color for floral designs. Stems exude milky sap when cut.



Corncockle
Agrostemma githago

Harvest when flowers are just beginning to unfold. Flowers will open in fresh flower food solution. Cut at base of stem or just above first set of leaves.



Foxtail Fern
Asparagus densiflorus 'Myers'

Unusual line foliage lending pattern, contour, and texture in floral arrangements. Like other asparagus ferns, it can often overwinter, especially if protected. Leaflike appendages (cladophylls) shed when foliage is losing freshness. This is true for all species of *Asparagus*.



Love Lies Bleeding
Amaranthus caudatus

Dramatic tassels of flowers. Designers remove the foliage in order to emphasize the clean, hanging line.



Asparagus Fern
Asparagus densiflorus 'Sprengeri'

Versatile foliage for floral arrangements and garlands. Take care to avoid thorns, which can lodge into skin and cause irritation. Individual cladophylls (leaf-like blades) will fall off stems when foliage is not fresh. Prolific growth habit once the plant is established.



Kangaroo Paw
Anigozanthos sp.

Flowers resemble small, velvety animal feet and provide textural contrast in designs. Not winter hardy in South Mississippi, so must be protected or grown as an annual.



Ming Fern
Asparagus macowanii

Makes a design all by itself due to tree-like appearance of stems. Use entire stems in landscape-style floral arrangements or just a few clusters for flowers-to-wear designs using adhesive mechanics.



Plumosa Fern
Asparagus setaceus

Perfect for soft, flowing wedding bouquets. It provides pattern and texture variation in designs. Layer it over masses of flowers for a veiling effect.



Ornamental Kale
Brassica sp.

So many varieties; long-lasting when stored/displayed in a cool environment.



Cast Iron Plant
Aspidistra elatior

These leaves are the basis for creative leaf work in floral designs. Plant in shady locations and forget it because it takes a few years to establish in gardens.



Beautyberry
Callicarpa sp.

Give it lots of room and sun to get the best return. Vivid violet, milky white, or pink berries are clustered on long stems. Remove foliage before using in arrangements because the foliage will decline faster than the berried branches and hide the unique line.



Aucuba
Aucuba japonica

Tropical foliage provides an exotic flair in designs due to splashes of golden yellow on deep green leaves.



Camellia
Camellia japonica, C. sasanqua

A must-have. Consider these showy flowers for wire-and-tape or adhesive mechanics for flowers-to-wear designs. Showier than a gardenia, though most are not scented; fall and winter color.



River Birch
Betula nigra

Harvest twigs, manually defoliate, and use in fresh or dried state. The twigs will be more flexible when fresh but still keep some resiliency when dried. Harvest exfoliated bark for design.



Flowering Quince
Chaenomeles sp.

Harvest when blooms are tight. For earlier blooms, force them into flowering by placing cut stems in fresh flower food solution indoors, where temperatures are warmer.



Balloonplant Milkweed

Asclepias physocarpa

Egg-shaped pods are lime green and covered in hairs. Unique in floral designs. Stems exude milky sap that can irritate skin.



Dahlia

Dahlia sp.

Large blooms create focal impact in fresh floral designs. Dahlias grow from tubers, which are swollen stem tissues that grow underground.



Billy Buttons

Craspedia globosa

A type of yarrow, but with a ball-shaped flower head. Works well in both fresh and dried floral designs.



Queen Anne's Lace

Daucus carota

Daucus and *Ammi*, two types of Queen Anne's lace, are popular filler flowers in bouquets and arrangements.



Crocosmia, Montbretia

Crocosmia sp.

This fiery-colored cousin of gladiolus grows from corms that freely multiply. Produces graceful cut flowers that, if left on the plant, produce bead-shaped, bronze fruits. Stunning in summer and fall arrangements.



Persimmon

Diospyros sp.

Grow for branches with attached fruit, or impale detached fruit on skewers and use in designs for focal impact.



Umbrella Grass, Papyrus

Cyperus alternifolius

Flourishes in moist to wet soils. Keep controlled or plant in wide, open areas because clumps can take over a space. Makes a good houseplant if kept constantly moist to wet. Harvest the long stems, which are topped with tufts of foliage.



Cone Flower

Echinacea sp.

Fantastic as a fresh flower, but seed heads, fresh or dried, look great in late summer and fall designs.



Elaeagnus, Silver Thorn

Elaeagnus sp.

Most people think of this only as a dense, fast-growing shrub, but the cut branches bring line and volume to massive arrangements for events. Easily formed into wreaths and garlands. May be aggressive in the landscape, so plant in a spot where it has plenty of room to grow.



Freesia

Freesia sp.

A fragrant cut flower with wiry stems and funnel-shaped flowers produced from a corm. The flower head possesses a gracefully arching profile.



Horse Tails

Equisetum hyemale

An unusual line material for open-styled floral designs. Can spread and be invasive in gardens. A moisture-loving plant.



Gardenia

Gardenia sp.

Blossoms can be used by the flower or with flowers attached to woody stems. Consider floating flowers on the water surface in a low bowl. They work well for flowers-to-wear or -carry designs, but take care to avoid handling the soft petals once the flowers open.



Sea Holly

Eryngium sp.

Thistle-like cut flower, approximately 1 inch long, with bright blue color; fades to gray-blue when air dried. Available in blue or white. Perennial that blooms in second and subsequent years.



Gloriosa Lily

Gloriosa superba

Can be seen clinging by its coil-ing leaf tips to fences and shrubs around old homesteads in South Mississippi. Coveted by high-end florists. Use the flowers attached to their long vines as well as individual flowers.



Eucalyptus

Eucalyptus sp.

Can form a small to large tree, but branches are susceptible to die-out. Use fresh or preserve with a 30–50 percent vegetable glycerin solution.



Globe Amaranth

Gomphrena globosa

As a fresh-cut flower, it has the appearance of clover. The flower head is papery and dry in its fresh state and remains the same as an air-dried flower, even retaining the same color.



Needlepoint Ivy
Hedera helix

Small-leaved ivies, including variegated types, provide interesting pattern to floral designs when stems run along tabletops or cascade from bouquets. Consider growing from containers in order to harvest clean, cascading stems with rhythmic leaf orientations. May be aggressive if allowed to establish in the ground.



Foxtail Barley
Hordeum jubatum

Soft, flowing ornamental grass; fresh or dried. Harvest before the seed heads are fully dried. Rubber-band about 10 stems together, and hang upside-down in a warm space with plenty of air circulation. This form of drying will keep stems straight.



Sunflowers
Helianthus sp.

It is best to source non-pollen-bearing sunflowers for interior floral designs. Foliage is short-lived on cut sunflowers, so it is best to remove all leaves before arranging. Once petals start to die, remove them and arrange the green flower heads. Dried sunflowers are interesting for fall arrangements.



Hosta
Hosta sp.

Any type of Hosta foliage is beautiful as long as it is healthy and unblemished. It can act as an accent in design, form a collar around bouquets, or envelop smaller flowers in a bud vase. Consider variegated forms as well as old-fashioned blue-green types.



Straw Flower
Helichrysum sp.

Harvest straw flowers before all petals unfurl, revealing central disc. This method discourages flowers from shattering or falling apart. Designers often glue the dried flower head to an artificial stem, such as a wire or skewer.



Hops
Humulus lupulus

Fresh or dried hops garlands can be used for weddings and events. The running vine grows on twine, which can be left in place for resiliency if used as a garland. The vine can be arranged in a serpentine pattern along tabletops, or spiraled on candelabra and banisters.



Coral Bells
Heuchera sp.

Coral bells' broad and often distinctively colored foliage helps designers to create visual weight at the base of designs such as a bouquet collar or focal area concentration. Their airy flower heads are nice in arrangements, but the colorful foliage makes this plant valuable for cut-arrangement design.



Hydrangea
Hydrangea sp.

Established hydrangea plants can produce pink, reddish, white, or blue flowers, or combinations of these colors. Leave on the plant until flowers begin to take on a papery appearance, then harvest and continue to air dry. For fresh-cut use, a commercial citric acid dip helps keep flowers from collapsing.



Star Anise
Illicium floridanum

Yellowish-green cut foliage adds contrast of texture and pattern in floral designs. Lends a spicy fragrance when crushed or brushed. Star-shaped seed pods are approximately 1 inch across.



Nandina
Nandina domestica

Nandina offers a graceful, lacy pattern as well as color accent to floral designs. Vase life is fair, but should not limit this plant from the marketplace as a cut ornamental foliage. Harvest woody stems at least 2 feet in length.



Statice
Limonium sp.

Statice grows best in full sun and in well-drained soil. Harvest stems before or just when small, white flowers open within the colorful, papery bracts. Bract colors include yellow, raspberry, and royal purple. To dry, gather five to ten stems with rubber bands and hang upside down in a warm space with plenty of air circulation, out of direct sunlight.



Daffodil
Narcissus sp.

Harvest daffodil flowers before the petals open. They can be wrapped in newspaper and dry-stored in refrigeration for up to 2 weeks, then recut and placed in fresh flower food solution.



Monstera
Monstera deliciosa

Lush, tropical foliage lends an exotic, high-end look to interiors. Just a few leaves in a clear vase can create a stunning arrangement.



White Lace
Orlaya sp.

Resembling Queen Anne's lace, this white filler flower looks fine by itself or combined with other flowers in fresh floral designs.



**Southern Wax Myrtle,
Bayberry**
Morella cerifera

Lends a yellowish-green hue to floral designs. Small, gray berries are closely attached to stems. Responds well to glycerin preservation.



Star of Bethlehem, Chinchinchee
Ornithogalum thyrsoides

Long-lasting spikes with white or bright orange, star-shaped florets that can stay in bloom for 1–2 months. Harvest when lower florets are ready to open.



Rice
Oryza sativa

Rice on the stem adds soft lines to floral designs. Bundle it for a harvest look and add to wreaths and arrangements.



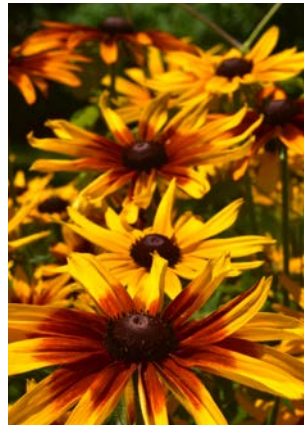
Pomegranate
Punica sp.

Stems with attached fruit create great interest in summer and fall arrangements. Individual fruits can be used for focal-area emphasis. Insert a pick, a slender dowel, or a few wooden skewers into the fruit to make an artificial stem, then anchor into floral design mechanics.



Chinese Lantern
Physalis alkekengi

Take care to contain this plant in the garden because it can quickly spread. Berry-type fruits are encased in rusty-orange, papery coverings positioned along stems. Remove drying foliage for clean lines. Great in fall arrangements.



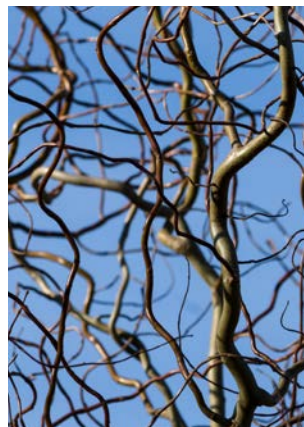
Black-eyed Susan
Rudbeckia sp.

Black-eyed Susans are very easy to grow. Bright gold flowers liven up designs, and, if left on the plant, dried seed heads are nice in fall arrangements.



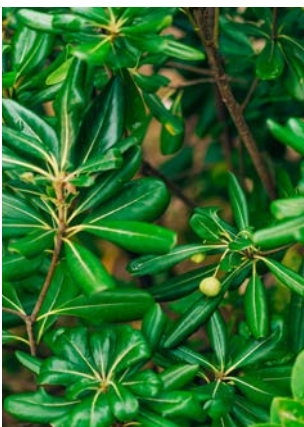
Physocarpus, Ninebark
Physocarpus sp.

Wine-colored foliage on long stems make nice accents when a deeper color is needed. Consider foliage branches such as these when creating designs where long-lasting displays are needed.



Corkscrew Willow, Curly Willow
Salix sp.

Growing to the size of a small tree, the base stems of this plant have numerous curves and turns. Stems can be used in fresh or dried state, but remove foliage because it dries quickly and obscures the curvy lines.



Variegated and Green Pittosporum
Pittosporum tobira

Deep green or variegated gray-green with cream, this foliage fills a design pattern quickly and is easy to grow. Oval-shaped leaves grow in rosettes, and stems quickly fill in an arrangement's pattern.



Pitcher Plant
Sarracenia sp.

The funnel-shaped leaves of this plant are spectacular. Pitcher plant enjoys moist soil. Cultivate this plant rather than harvesting it from the wild as its habitat is greatly depleted.



Millet
Setaria sp.

As the flower head matures, it curves downward. It can be cut and used before curving or afterward. Birds love the seed.



Talinum
Talinum paniculata

Wiry, wispy stems bear small flowers. The pinkish, bead-like seed pods are showier than the flowers.



Jackson Vine, Smilax, Lanceleaf Greenbrier
Smilax smallii

Southern smilax is prized for decorating arbors, posts, and tents for weddings and events. It creates long-lasting displays, both in and out of water sources, but the plant is considered invasive. Southern gardeners have a difficult time controlling it. It has an underground rhizome tuber storage system.



Arborvitae
Thuja sp.

Fern-like leaves and lime-green color lend beautiful pattern to floral arrangements and bouquets. Add this foliage to mixed-greenery designs year-round. It is especially lovely as a contrasting foliage in holiday wreaths.



Bird of Paradise
Strelitzia reginae

Brightly contrasting orange and blue flowers bloom on mature plants. Several complete flower segments are hidden within the green bract. They can be displayed all at once by gently reflexing the bract and carefully fanning the florets outward.



Tulip
Tulipa sp.

Harvest when petals begin to show color. Tulips can be harvested and placed in bunches of 5–10 stems, wrapped in newspaper, and dry-stored in refrigeration for about 10 days, then placed in fresh flower food solution to hydrate. Leave in paper sleeves until stems have fully hydrated and are puffy. Stems can elongate up to 1 inch per day.



Marigold
Tagetes sp.

Easy to grow flower that looks terrific in designs due to the pure, glowing yellow or orange hues. The fragrance can be overpowering, so remove all foliage before using in designs.



Calla and Mini Calla Lily
Zantedeschia sp.

Interesting cut flower for contemporary design where designers highlight the flower's stem as well as the trumpet-shaped inflorescence.



Zinnia Benary Mix and others

Zinnia sp.

A southern floral arranging staple that can rival dahlias or gerbera, and much easier to grow. Start transplants from seed and consider planting at 14-day intervals to extend the harvest.

References

- Benzakein, E. (2017.) Profitable, small-scale flower farming. *Heirloom Gardener, Summer 2017*. Retrieved from <http://www.heirloomgardener.com/organic-gardening/flower-farm-zm0z17uzkin>
- Butler, S., DelPrince, J., Fowler, C., Gilliam, H., Johnson, J., McKinley, W., Money-Collins, H., Moss, L., Murray, P., Pamper, K., Scace, P., Shelton, F., Verheijen, A., & Whalen, K. (2005). *The AIFD guide to floral design: Terms, techniques, and traditions*. Intelvid: Flourtown, PA.
- Collins, P., Denny, G., Layton, B., & Henn, A. (2018). Publication 2835 *Roses in Mississippi*. Mississippi State University Extension Service.
- Gu, M. (2009). Publication 2559 *Specialty cut flower production resources: References*. Mississippi State University Extension Service.
- Gu, M. (2009). Information Sheet 1794 *Specialty cut flower production: Meet the markets*. Mississippi State University Extension Service.
- Hudson, D., & Griffin, E. (2004). *Market potential for Mississippi grown cut flowers*. MAFES Bulletin 1140.
- Kelly, L., Wise, S., & Pennington, S. (2014). Publication 2449 *Grow your business with flower garden "signs."* Mississippi State University Extension Service.
- Moyer, J. (2015). What nobody told me about small farming: I can't make a living. *Salon.com, February 9, 2015*. Retrieved from http://www.salon.com/2015/02/10/what_nobody_told_me_about_small_farming_i_cant_make_a_living/
- Porter, W. (2010). Publication 2574 *Hydrangeas for Mississippi gardens*. Mississippi State University Extension Service.
- Sloan, C., & Harkness, S. (2010). *Planting date and pinch treatments affect growth of field-grown, cut-flower sunflower cultivars*. MAFES Bulletin 1180.
- Society of American Florists. (2016). *Floral industry facts*. Retrieved from <https://safnow.org/trends-statistics/floral-industry-facts/#US>
- The Gardener's Workshop. (2008). *Cut-flower harvest guide*. Retrieved from <http://www.thegardenersworkshop.com/pdfs/HarvestGuide.pdf>
- USDA. (2016). *Floriculture crops 2015 summary*. Retrieved from <http://usda.mannlib.cornell.edu/usda/current/FlorCrop/FlorCrop-04-26-2016.pdf>
- USDA, NRCS. (2018). The PLANTS Database (<http://plants.usda.gov>, 3 January 2018). National Plant Data Team, Greensboro, NC 27401-4901 USA.



Publication 3226 (POD-07-18)

By **James M. DelPrince**, PhD, AIFD, PFCI, Assistant Extension Professor, Coastal Mississippi Research and Extension Center.

Copyright 2018 by Mississippi State University. All rights reserved. This publication may be copied and distributed without alteration for nonprofit educational purposes provided that credit is given to the Mississippi State University Extension Service.

Produced by Agricultural Communications.

Mississippi State University is an equal opportunity institution. Discrimination in university employment, programs, or activities based on race, color, ethnicity, sex, pregnancy, religion, national origin, disability, age, sexual orientation, genetic information, status as a U.S. veteran, or any other status protected by applicable law is prohibited. Questions about equal opportunity programs or compliance should be directed to the Office of Compliance and Integrity, 56 Morgan Avenue, P.O. 6044, Mississippi State, MS 39762, (662) 325-5839.

Extension Service of Mississippi State University, cooperating with U.S. Department of Agriculture. Published in furtherance of Acts of Congress, May 8 and June 30, 1914. GARY B. JACKSON, Director