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Introduction

Growing flowers to sell at the local farmer's market started out as a part-time hobby for Linda Tobey. In just three years, her hobby has blossomed into a full-time summer business, with one helper and an acre of flowers in her town's first U-Pick flower patch. Linda grows lilies, larkspur, golden daisies, zinnias, statice, blue salvia, dahlias, yellow asters, snapdragons and cosmos.



According to Linda, "Flowers are a perfect cash crop, because they are easy to grow, produce quickly, and supply an income throughout the season. In addition, the startup costs can be low, because you only have to buy seeds and supply labor."

Her advice to would-be flower growers: "Plan your garden for sales. Make it easy for your customers to cut their own flowers, and they will come back often. Keep prices reasonable. For every plant in the garden, we try for a yield of two dollars per square foot."

Virginia flower grower Lisa Ziegler sells her flowers at the Williamsburg Farmer's Market, where her sunflower and hydrangea blossoms bring as much as five dollars a stem! When asked to name her favorite cut flower, she jokes, "Anyone with a vase life of at least seven days, that doesn't shatter on the tabletop or drop pollen or require a lot of special handling."

Lisa sticks to proven cut flower varieties, such as snapdragons, larkspur, peonies, sunflowers and zinnias. During the growing season, through October, she sells three to four thousand stems each week. Says Lisa, "For those who love being in the garden and watching the flowers grow, there is nothing else like my business."

If you love to grow plants, and wondered how to turn your green thumb into a spare-time income, flower growing could be just right for you. You can start small, and turn your backyard or acreage into a money-maker for you.

Flower growing is an ideal business for:

- Rural folks with larger yards or a few acres.
- Mothers who want to stay home with the kids, but need extra income.
- Retired folks, who want extra income...and who've always enjoyed growing things.
- Farmers who want to make more than they can off regular crops.
- Anyone who loves to garden.



In this guide, you'll learn about the best floral money-makers, including:

- Cut flowers.
- Everlastings.
- Woody ornamentals.
- Flower bulbs.

You'll also learn how to grow and market your floral crops.

- The best markets for your flowers, both wholesale and retail.
- The varieties in demand from buyers and consumers.
- Value-added products you can make to double your profits.
- Wholesale sources for seeds, transplants and growing supplies.

If you're like most beginning growers, you'll want to start small, to get a feel for what works best in your area, both for growing and marketing. Since each region has several unique micro-climates, you'll discover that some flowers will do great in your garden, and some poorly.

The same goes for markets. One grower may sell their entire crop at Farmer's Markets, while another will do best selling dried flowers (everlastings) to crafts shops and florists. You can't learn this overnight, so take my advice, and "tip-toe" into the new world of flower growing. That way, you'll learn without making too many costly mistakes.



Best Flowers To Grow

We surveyed flower growers around the country, and asked them to name the flowers that were:

- Easiest to grow
- Most reliable
- Most productive
- Most in demand

We've listed information useful to market growers for each flower, and you'll find more complete starting, planting and growing information for specific flower cultivars in nursery catalogs, web sites, or on individual seed packets.

Start with several of these proven favorites your first growing season, then experiment with other varieties, adding new flowers to your growing list each year for trials. In time, you'll learn what grows best in your "micro-climate", and which flowers are most in demand from your customers.

Both the botanical name and the common name are listed for the flowers. You'll find most flowers listed by botanical name in seed and nursery catalogs, but your retail customers will usually use the common name.



Best Annual Flowers To Grow

Ageratum (Floss flower)

- Tall growing “Blue Horizon” and “Florist’s White” are two cultivars ideal for market growers.
- Start indoors or in greenhouse six to eight weeks before last frost date, then plant in rows 12” apart.
- Harvest when the flowers begin to open.

Antirrhinum (Snap Dragon)

- The long-stemmed “Rocket” cultivar popular with growers.
- Harvest when the flowers are half open.
- Start indoors eight weeks before last frost date, the plant in garden 12” apart.
- Support netting will help the flowers avoid wind damage.
- Harvest when half the flowers are open.



Celosia

- Christata, Plumosa and Spicata are best varieties for cutting.
- Can be started indoors, or direct seeded in the garden after last frost.
- This is a large plant, so allow 12” to 18” between plants.
- Harvest “Cristata” when flowers are fully open, the others when the flowers are almost fully open.

