Cutting Gardens

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SPEAKERS
Cindy Haynes, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, Christa Hartsook, Olivia Hanlon

Christa Hartsook 00:15
Hello, and welcome to the small farms podcast, a production of the small farms program at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Our podcast covers the opportunities and challenges associated with rural life.

Olivia Hanlon 00:29
In this episode, I visit with Cindy Haynes, Extension Horticulture specialist and associate professor with Iowa State University. Today we are talking about cutting gardens. I'm Olivia Hanlon farm food and enterprise development education extension specialist and we hope you enjoy the show. Cindy, welcome. We're glad to have you joining us today.

Cindy Haynes 00:47
Thank you so much for having me, Olivia. I appreciate it.

Olivia Hanlon 00:50
Cindy, I think this is your first time here on our farms podcast. So why don't we start with you telling us a little bit about yourself and what your role entails here at Iowa State.

Cindy Haynes 01:01
Right. So I've been in Iowa state for over 20 years. In the Department of Horticulture that entire time as an extension specialist in horticulture. I also teach in the Department of Horticulture. My area of expertise is consumer horticulture. So I work a lot with gardeners, master
gardeners, undergraduate students, the whole gamit of people answering some gardening questions, and hopefully getting them excited and engaged about gardening

Olivia Hanlon 01:32
Awesome. Well, we're very excited to have you today. Like I said, we're talking cutting gardens. So why don't we go ahead and get started with that, by talking about how we know if there's even a possibility of having a cutting garden on our acreage or operation? How much space do we need for something like that?

Cindy Haynes 01:50
Well, home gardeners can do this in just a small raised bed, or you can have something larger and more dedicated. So what I suggest to people is to start small, because cutting gardens do require some maintenance, there's regular harvest, that has to happen as well. So that you get you get into the systems and the maintenance and, and the planting and the harvesting. And then you get bigger and bigger as you feel more confident in your abilities to handle this. So it doesn't require a lot of space to have a little cutting garden as a home gardener. But to do this as a side hustle or as something that is involved in maybe at a farmers market, or even a farmer florists, you need some dedicated space for growing flowers. And we're looking at probably half an acre. Yeah, so you can grow a lot. And what was the typical home demonstration garden, which was like a 40. By 80, you can pour a lot of flowers. And if you've got flowers that are repeatedly blooming, you can do a lot with them.

Olivia Hanlon 02:57
Right? So once we decide that we've got the space for this, how are we going to decide where a good spot to put our cutting garden is on our land.

03:05
So almost all flowers that are used for cut flowers have similar requirements. They need full sun, well drained soils. And then you want a dedicated space where you can control weeds, you have access to water, probably going to need this stake things because they kind of grow tall and long stems. So you have some of those constraints that so you need something that's easy and accessible and has access and ability to water. But still might be you know, good soil, well trained soil and full sun, they usually the best that they have full sun. And then there's often fertilizer that might be required as well. And so there's other things to consider. But that's, that's the general basics on what you have to have to do well.

Olivia Hanlon 03:52
Okay, perfect. And what kind of flowers should we consider planting? What are some of the most common cut flowers that we find out there?
There's a lot most of the cut flowers that a farmer forest will be growing, I would say or better than 50% are going to be annual flowers. So things like Zinnias things like Lizzie Hansen's, maybe gladiolas or snapdragons. They might have some bolts in the mix too, that they grow for spring or lilies that they have for later in the summer. And those might be some perennial flowers or Peonies are very popular cut flower as well. Primarily annual flowers. So annual flowers that are started as seed, maybe indoors or sewn directly in the garden like sunflowers and grown, water fertilized and hopefully repeatedly harvested throughout the summer months.

Okay, so you lead right into my next question here. Do we want to plant seeds or do we want to transplant some of these which one is more common?

Yeah, I think it depends on the species. Okay, so something like sunflowers really don't like to be transplanted. So directly sowing those seeds in the garden is usually more successful. So sunflowers you might sow directly. But if you're going to grow a solutia, you're probably going to start those inside first and then transplant them out later. So it depends on the species. Many of the annuals that we're going to transplant out into the garden, we're going to start them indoors, about eight weeks, anywhere from four to eight weeks before planting. So there's some investment of time ahead of time before transplanting. And then you know, you're going to be successful, because you have a plant that you're planting was sunflowers, and maybe a few other things. There's some amaranth you can sow directly in the garden, there's probably a few others as well for foliage that you could serve directly in the garden. But then we saw generally twice as much as we need to come back in again, because of like some flowers, birds tend to find them as well. So we're gonna have to do a little thinning and make sure we do some proper spacing for certain things like sunflowers. Okay, so it depends on the species totally depends. And you can do a little research and figure that out. And even the seed packet will often tell you, it's fine.

Absolutely, and I'm sure the seed packet will have this information too Cindy. But when we're looking at some of our more common flowers, when's a good time to get those started?

Yeah, absolutely. So once we've got them out there, and they are trying to survive the summer heat, what kind of care is required for our cutting garden.
06:36
Right. So if we're going to start them indoors, usually sometime in March is a good time to steal those indoors and get them started. Maybe early March, that way you're taking a decent sized transplant out into the garden, probably the middle of May, that's about six, somewhere to six to eight weeks, the timeframe. That also means that a couple of weeks after establishment, many of these flowers are blooming sometime in June, we want them blooming so that we can recoup back costs and make money off pretty quickly. So that's the other advantage to starting indoors.

07:01
Right, so after planting that cutting garden, there is some some care that first month is going to be quite a bit and setting things up. So a farmer florist will probably have some sort of irrigation system set up, or at least the soaker hose so that you can water consistently, throughout the summer, especially when it gets hot, there's probably going to be some mulch, that's laid down to help control weeds. Because the first month you really need to be on top of weeds that compete for resources, for water for nutrients, and they really impacts the quality of the flowers. So and that's another thing to consider with a cut flower garden, be looking for that ideal perfect cut flower. So that's pretty important that there's not any competition from anything else. Okay, you also have to plan for certain species that have some sort of support system. Some flowers are, you know, tall, they seem like they're kind of spindly stems. So and we have wind and Iowa. So you might need to have a grid, or just some trellis or some stakes, or just even twine in kind of a square pattern that they kind of grow up through to help support and to promote more of those kind of long, sturdy, straight stems, which is what we're looking for. And then when you're watering, you probably have to give them a little bit of fertilizer as well, because you want them to continually bloom. Even after we harvest one we want another set of blooms. So kind of consistent fertilizer, not a lot of high nitrogen fertilizer, but still consistent fertilizer is important, at least through Office.

Olivia Hanlon 09:10
Okay, so speaking of when we're getting ready to cut those flowers, how do we know when those flowers are ready to be cut or the blooms are ready to be cut? And how frequently do we usually cut them?

09:21
That's a great question, Olivia. And it's it's a hard one to answer because it really depends on the species. Again, most of what we're growing as a cut flower, we want to harvest at a fairly young age. So it's often showing some sort of color, but maybe not fully open. But that depends. So Gladiolus, who would harvest with maybe one flower at the bottom open, showing just a little bit of color, and all of the others are fairly tight. Whereas Zinnia we want it to be a little more open than that. So it's species dependent. Sometimes there's some resources that I'll send to you that kind of give you information on each individual species. So it can vary just a little bit. But the plan is you harvest something in a fairly young state, so that it looks good at the consumer for as long as possible. Right. So, yeah, so sometimes there's just a little bit of
color charm peonies, we harvest them when they're in bud and we just see a little bit of the color, they're not even open yet, because we know they will continue to open as you can bring them on basis.

Olivia Hanlon 10:34
Okay. So when we're cutting them, we talked about these long stemy flowers, right. So where do we want to cut our flowers at in order for them to be prime for our bases,

10:45
right, so we want to cut them with two considerations here, we want the longest stems possible for arrangements. So we want fairly long sturdy stems. But we also want to cut them at a place where there might be a node where they would send up another side shoot so that they would bloom again. So sometimes, with a peony, that's going down a little bit, too, you see kind of a node and, and maybe there'll be as maybe there'll be a side shoot, maybe there won't be with peonies. With some others, like Zinnias, you can go all the way down the stem. And then there's often a side shoot over the moon again, about two weeks later, something like tulips, it doesn't matter where you cut them, they're not going to send up another one. So So those are the things you think about when you're deciding what to cut, and how long to cuts, I would say making it as long as possible is probably the first decision. And then the second decision is making sure if it would rebloom that there's enough material left on the plant so that it can send up kind of a sideshow. This is also something you get pretty good at once you start doing and you pay attention. You figure it out that oh, I need to cut here for roses. I need to do this for peonies. Um, I need to do this. You know, it's a little different in different species.

Olivia Hanlon 12:19
Absolutely. Yeah, that makes a lot of sense there, Cindy. So you kind of hit on this, but do lots of flowers that we're going to harvest, grow back or grow additional blooms after we cut.

12:30
Some of them do. Some of them do not do this, well. Some of them that are very seasonal, like peonies, you've got about a two week window tulips you know, you might get a two week window. They're very short season. But then Zinnias are blooming all summer long. So once again, very species dependent. I think this is also dependent on whether you're growing annuals or perennials. So farmer florist will often grow some of the seasonal things like lilacs and peonies, to kind of have that spring one time, and then have the reliance on the zinnias. The down yields the lavender kind of later in the season, which is a fun part, right? So that it's never quite the same all the time. Right? And you always have something. Yes. And you always have something and lots of colors and always surrounded by beauty.

Olivia Hanlon 13:27
Absolutely, all right. So if anyone is wanting more information on anything that we talked about,
Absolutely, all right. So if anyone is wanting more information on anything that we talked about today, Cindy, or if they have any additional questions, where should they look? What are some good resources or who should they reach out to?

13:39
Alright, so we do have some resources on the hort and home fest, newsletter web page, okay, which is at Hort News dot extension dot iastate dot edu. Okay, so that's where you can get some of this information. I'll also send you Olivia, a list of the handouts with a plant that I did for a Master Gardener webinar over the winter, which does have some resources. There's a cut flower, kind of American grown flowers association or specialty cut flowers association. So if you get into this, there are places you can go and become members that have a whole nother host resources and networks that you can use as well. So it's, there's lots of little avenues. I'll hopefully get someone started and then they can continue doing some more.

Olivia Hanlon 14:34
Awesome, and I will be sure to get that sheet that you mentioned into the show notes for anyone who wants to find that. I have one last question for you today. Cindy, what is your favorite flower that grows on a cutting garden and why?

14:49
Oh, this just it depends on the day. So I love flowers and I'm always growing lots of different flowers today my favorite flower or it might be a good cut flowers to Magnolia is forming on campus, or some woody plants that are great of flowers. I love lilacs as well. But this summer, I'm going to be into those violas and the lavender. And the lilies, I love lilies too so my answer today is very different than it would be tomorrow. Sorry.

Olivia Hanlon 15:24
Okay, is there anything that we didn't cover today that you'd like to add?

15:29
I think the one thing that I might mention Olivia is how to care for these flowers after you harvest. Okay, that becomes pretty important.

Olivia Hanlon 15:38
A good tip right before Mother's Day,
right before Mother's days. So make sure that when you're harvesting flowers, they go into water as quickly as possible. You take the bucket, or the vase out there with you, instead of a basket so that you're placing them as water as soon as possible, they last longer that way. And then if you're gonna put anything in the water, and make sure it's one of those four preservatives are alive the Cristalle there's some others that are out there that you can purchase. They work better than pennies on nails or aspirin or sugar, all of those things. Don't even hold a candle to what that floor life solution can do for your flowers and how long they typically last. So if you want those Mother's Day flowers or any cut flowers to last longer, invest in some of that and frequently change the water keep it clean, and that keeps them lasting even.

Olivia Hanlon 16:39
Okay, well thank you very much for joining us today. Cindy. We loved having you on and we look forward to having you on again in the future sometime.

Cindy Haynes 16:47
Thank you I'd love to be on next.

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach 16:48
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