

Cut Flowers

Information compiled by the California Cut Flower Commission

How Produced – California dominates the domestic cut flower industry because of its favorable Mediterranean climate, which allows for year-round production of an enormous variety of flowers.

Cut flowers are grown in covered green houses and outside in open fields. The floriculture industry, which includes the production of bedding and potted plants, shrubbery and fruit stock, as well as cut flowers and foliage, is extremely labor intensive, requiring as many as 12 workers per acre. Flowers are harvested by hand and then pre-cooled and boxed to prevent heat buildup and premature decay. United States cut flower growers ship approximately two-thirds of their product by truck and the other one-third by air. Transit time from the grower/shipper to retail outlets varies widely, but can take as little as 24 hours—even to the East Coast. Most flowers are purchased during four key holiday months: February, April, May and December. Besides holiday sales, flowers are typically purchased for two reasons: to express an emotion or to send “get well” wishes.

Varieties – Color and scent are distinguishing features of cut flowers, however they are generally categorized as one of four types used in floral design; line flowers, mass flowers, filler flowers and foliage. Line flowers are tall, and give the bouquet height, width and a balanced look. Examples of line flowers are gladiolus, snapdragons and curly willows. Mass or “face” flowers give bouquets weight, or mass and are generally round and full faced. They are usually the focal point of color and interest in a bouquet. Most mass flowers come with only one flower on the end of the stem. Examples include roses, carnations, gerberas, sunflowers, lilies, daffodils, tulips, irises, freesias, zinnias, alstroemerias, proteas and chrysanthemums. Filler flowers, stems with a lot of little flowers and foliage, round out the bouquet and give it a soft, full look. Casual, fresh-from-the garden, bouquets use an abundance of filler flowers to visually connect mass and line flowers. Examples of filler flowers are baby’s breath, Queen Anne’s lace, heather and aster. The last type of plant used in floral design is foliage. Foliage refers to the leaves and greenery used to complement floral arrangements. Foliage can also conceal the “mechanics” of an arrangement, such as floral foam. Fern, eucalyptus, salal and myrtle are all examples of foliage.

Like most California crops, some flower varieties are available year-round while others are not. Many flowers are only available during certain times of the year based on seasonality. For the highest quality and most inexpensive California flowers, consumers can select flower varieties that are “in season.”

Commodity Value – California leads the nation in cut flower value of production, accounting for 77 percent of the nation’s total production. California producers market cut flowers and foliage, valued at more than \$320 million (wholesale value) annually, to the nation’s 40,000 florists and 24,000 supermarket floral departments, as well as to numerous kiosks and outlets. California retail florists alone employ approximately 11,000 people.



Top Producing Counties – The leading county is Santa Barbara. Other major producing counties include San Diego, Monterey, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Humboldt and Ventura.

History – California is considered the originator of America’s commercial cut flower industry, which began in the late 1870s when a Ventura housewife, Theodosia Shepard, was inspired to sell the flowers she raised in her garden. Soon, other women were following suit and bringing their backyard beauty to the local market, and the retail florist profession was born. This period marked a time when French Impressionists began depicting flowers in their paintings and women’s magazines began counseling homemakers on flower care and display.

At the turn of the century the state’s cut flower industry expanded even further as many immigrant families turned their love of beauty and their botanical talents to flower production. The Chinese, Japanese, Italians and Dutch revolutionized the floriculture industry in California and make up much of the industry to this day.

For additional information:

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Cut Flowers Activity Sheet

Line Flowers

gladiolus, liatris, snapdragon, delphinium, veronica, curly willow

Filler Flowers

baby's breath, Queen Anne's lace, statice, aster

Mass Flowers

rose, carnation, sunflower, lily, iris, zinnia

Foliage

ferns, eucalyptus, salal, myrtle, ruscus



Beautiful Bouquet

Lesson Ideas

- Invite a floral designer to visit your classroom to teach about floral arranging and discuss the wide variety of career opportunities in the floral industry.
- Press flowers in waxed paper. Use the flowers to create a botany book, labeling each flower with its common and scientific name
- Create a manual illustrating the steps of cut flower pollination, fertilization and reproduction.
- Did you know that patterns often appear in nature? Research the Fibonacci sequence and determine how the sequence relates to cut flowers.
- Look at a variety of flowers. Categorize them as line, mass or filler flowers. Sort by color, smell and shape.
- Grow flowers from bulbs or seeds.
- Color a white carnation using food color in water to learn about capillary action.
- Dissect a flower and identify its parts.
- Experiment with different liquids to determine their effect on flower freshness.
- Research varieties of flowers that are edible and those that are poisonous.
- Plant a flower garden at your school with an assortment of varieties that will bloom during each season.
- Visit a commercial greenhouse or nursery to learn how cut flowers are produced.

Fantastic Facts

1. What are the four categories of flowers typically used in a bouquet?
 2. What four months result in the most flower sales?
 3. How are cut flowers shipped to floral retailers and wholesalers?
 4. Besides holidays, why are flowers typically purchased?
 5. What is the main expense in cut flower production?
 6. Cut flower production is just one part of which agricultural industry?
 7. Who is considered the founder of the cut flower industry in both California and the United States?
- 1) Mass, line, foliage and filler flowers 2) February, April, May and December because Valentines Day, Easter, Mothers Day and Christmas fall in these months 3) One-third by air and two-thirds by truck 4) To express emotion or to send "get well" wishes 5) Labor costs—it requires up to 12 workers per acre 6) The floriculture industry 7) Theodosia Shepard, a Ventura housewife

Lesson Plan: Make Your Own Potpourri

Introduction:

Making potpourri allows students to compare a variety of flowers based on texture, color and scent. Several mathematics and art concepts can be incorporated into this activity.

Materials:

Fresh flower petals and herbs, citrus peels, large cardboard sheet, paper towels, large bowl, large jar with lid, cinnamon (sticks or powder), a variety of scented oils.

Procedure:

1. Cover cardboard with paper towels.

2. Spread flower petals and citrus peels on the cardboard and let dry for 2-3 weeks, fluffing the mixture occasionally.
3. In large bowl, mix dried petals with all other ingredients except scented oil. Put a layer of mixture in the jar. Add 3-4 drops of scented oil. Continue to layer the mixture with the oil until the jar is full.
4. Put lid on the jar and leave 1-2 weeks, shaking daily to mix.
5. Finished potporri can be used in gift baskets or to make sachets.

