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**Growing
Together**

Case study: **Growing cut flowers**

Growing cut flowers for display and sale can create an income stream as well as having a beneficial impact on your volunteers and beneficiaries. They also look great!

This case study features tips and ideas from Amanda Clay and her team of volunteers who are growing fruit, vegetables and flowers on their ¼ acre site at Bishops Palace, a visitor attraction in Wells, Somerset.



The project

Bishops Palace is a visitors attraction, with a team of volunteer flower arrangers who add to the 'wow' factor of this medieval palace. The community garden group thought that they could add value by growing some of the flowers intended for display, on site in their own community garden.

They currently use only ¼ of the space that they have to grow flowers, but have recently been given an extra patch (30m long) to add to their flower growing activities. The flowers are on sale, along with fruit and vegetables, in the Palace gift shop.

Dahlias and Sweet Peas are popular flowers – but they also grow Asters, Cornflowers, Antirrhinums, Bupleurum, Alstroemeria and many more (see table overleaf listing varieties grown and sold).

The gardeners have worked closely with the volunteer flower arrangers to get advice about what will be the most useful thing to grow for the displays and how to make up the posies.

They start some of their seeds off in a non-heated greenhouse and then transplant into the ground after the final frost. Many flowers, such as cornflowers, are sown direct. Planting is done in 1 metre square blocks to make them easier to pick.

Amanda and her team have learnt as they have gone along - mostly by reading the backs of seed packets and having a go - but they have also found Sarah Raven's book, 'The Cutting Garden: Growing and Arranging Garden Flowers' helpful and have been able to scale up her ideas in their community garden space.

Some varieties have been less successful - Larkspur and Baby's Breath – but they are trying new flowers and growing ideas all the time. The final pages of this case study are a list of varieties that Amanda suggests for your cut flower garden.

Top tips and ideas

- Connect with a flower arranging society or individual, who has the skills to arrange bunches in the most attractive way – it is an art and will make a huge difference.

Your gardening volunteers can develop these skills too, adding to the benefit they receive from being part of the project.

- Pick early in the morning, or when the sun isn't too high, this will increase the vase life of your flowers and safeguard against them wilting too quickly.
- Choosing flowers with longer stems is helpful for displaying - and having the right selection of buckets to sell them from is useful!



Q & A session with Amanda

1. What marketing do you do for the flowers - anything that works well?

We don't really do any particular marketing for the flowers. As we are a visitor attraction, we have hundreds of people per day walking past our shop, and we have the flowers outside on a stall, with a board saying how much they are. We find that selling small bunches as posies for £1 works best for us, due to the audience (most people on a day out to a garden don't intend to buy a bunch of flowers), however in a different situation I am sure that flowers could be sold for a more realistic price.

We find that the best marketing tool we have is carrying the flowers over to the shop through the gardens. On many occasions we sell half of the bunches before we get there! We also provide free bunches to the cafe on site for tables, and some of the flowers are used for displays inside the main building, to give people a chance to see them.

2. What are your plans for the future?

For the future we intend to extend the flower selling season by planting more tulips and narcissus for early flowers, and to try to find something for the gap between these and the more usual 'summer' flowers. We are also hoping to extend into the autumn by growing chrysanthemums.

3. Any particularly useful tips on growing flowers in bulk to sell?

We usually plant flowers slightly closer together than it says on the packet, in blocks of the same thing (straight lines if possible). This makes it easy to pull out the plants once finished, and replace with something else. Sweet peas and dahlias sell particularly well, I think because they are not something usually on offer to buy elsewhere.

4. How long does the season last?

Our season usually lasts from around mid June to mid October, depending on the weather. We don't grow any flowers under cover, but using a polytunnel could extend this. This year for the first time we also had bunches of tulips to sell in April, which sold well although we didn't have that many.

5. What advice would you give to any community growing groups considering growing cut flowers for display or sale?

I would say give it a go, start small to build up your confidence. In the first few years we mainly focused on sweet peas and other annuals, bringing in dahlias and other flower arranging plants in later years.

If you want to grow flowers to use in more advanced bunches of flowers (rather than just posies), doing some sort of floristry course would be helpful so you know how to arrange the nicest bunches. It might also be worth contacting a local flower farm for advice if you are wanting to do something on a larger scale than just 'garden gate' sales.

6. Is there any other value apart from monetary, to the work in terms of community development, environment, skills etc?

Flowers lift the spirits, with the wonderful array of colours and scents. They provide volunteers with something different to work with than vegetables, and many people find picking the flowers one of their favourite tasks. Many flowers can have a great impact on local wildlife, attracting bees and other insects to the garden and creating a diverse and beautiful space.

Amanda's suggested varieties for your cut flower garden

Note: A/B/P = Annual/Biennial/Perennial

Flower	Variety	Sowing	Plant out	Spacing	Flowers	Colour	Height	A/B/P
Achillea	Mixed	N/A	N/A	N/A	July-Sept	Mixed pastel	60cm	P
Alchemilla Mollis	Lady's Mantle	N/A	N/A	N/A	May-Sept	Green	40cm	P
Alstroemeria	Ligtu Hybrids	March			June-July	Various	60-80cm	P
Ammi Majus	Bishops Flower x 2	March-April	Direct	30x25cm	June-Sept	White	60-90cm	A
Antirrhinum	Picasso Splash	Jan-March	After frost	40cm	June-Sept	Mosaic red, yellow and cream	40-50cm	A
Antirrhinum	Double Madame Butterfly Mixed	Jan-March	After frost	23-30cm	June-Sept	Mixed bright	60-90cm	A
Antirrhinum	Lucky Lips	Jan-March	After frost	23-30 cm	June-Sept	White and pink two tone	60cm	A
Aster	Giant Single Andrella Mixed	Feb-April	After frost	15cm	June-Sept	Mixed bright		A
Aster	Duchess Mixed	March-May	After frost	10cm	July-Sept	Mixed pastel	60cm	A
Aster	Madelaine Mixed	March-May	Late May			Mixed	60cm	A
Buplerum	Rotundifolium	March-May	Direct	25cm	May-Sept	Green	60-90cm	A
Calendula	Pink Surprise	March-May	Direct	30cm	June-Sept	Salmon pink	45cm	A
Calendula	Orange King	March-June	Direct	10cm	May-Sept	Orange	45-60cm	A
Carnation	Giant Chabaud Double Mix	May-June	Autumn	30cm	Summer	Mixed	45cm	P
Catananche Coerulea	Amor Blue	April-June			July-Sept	Blue	60cm	P
Catananche Coerulea	Amor White	April-June			July-Sept	White	60cm	P
Cerinthe	Major Purpurescens	N/A	N/A	N/A	May-August	Purple	60cm	P
Chrysanthemum	Summer Festival	April-May	Direct	15cm	Summer	Mixed bright	60-90cm	A
Chrysanthemum	Rainbow	Mar-May	Direct	15cm	June-Oct	Mixed bright	60cm	A
Coreopsis	Quills and Thrills Mixed x 2	Feb-April	After frost	30cm	Summer	Red and yellow fluted	60-90cm	A
Cornflower	Black Ball	March-May	Direct		May-Sept	Dark mauve	75cm	A

Flower	Variety	Sowing	Plant out	Spacing	Flowers	Colour	Height	A/B/P
Cornflower	Classic Romantic	March-May	Direct		May-Sept	White/pink shades	45cm	A
Cornflower	Double Blue	March-May	Direct		May-Sept	Blue	60cm	A
Cosmos	Rose Bonbon	March-May	After frost	30cm	Summer-autumn	Pink	60-90cm	A
Cosmos	Snow Puff	March-May	After frost	30cm	Summer-autumn	White	60-90cm	A
Dahlias	Bishop's Children	Feb-April	Late May	60cm	July - Oct	Mixed	60-75cm	P
Dahlias	Mixed	N/A	After frost`	75cm	July-Oct	Mixed bright	40cm-1m	P
Didiscus	Blue Lace	Feb-April	After frost	30cm	June-Oct	Blue	60cm	A
Echinops		N/A	N/A	N/A	June-Oct	Green/silver spiky balls	90cm	P
Echinacea	White Swan	Jan/June			July-Oct	White	60-70cm	P
Eryngium	Sea Holly	Autumn	Spring	30cm	July-Sept	Blue	60cm	P
Gladioli	Mixed	N/A	N/A	N/A	July-Oct	Mixed bright	90cm	P
Gypsophila	Covent Garden	March-May	Direct		18 weeks	White	45cm	A
Gypsophila	Paniculata	March-May			June-Aug	White	100cm	P
Helipterum	Brilliant Rose	March-May	May-June	30cm	July-Sept	Pink	50cm	A
Larkspur	Giant Imperial	March-May	Direct	25cm	June-Sept	Mixed pastel	90cm	A
Larkspur	Little Rocket	March-May	Direct	25cm	June-Sept	Mixed pastel	38cm	A
Michalemas Daisies					Aug-Oct	Purple shades	90cm	P
Nicotiana	Langsdorffii x 2	Feb-April	After frost	50cm	July-Sept	Lime green	1.2m	A
Nicotiana	Marshmallow	Feb-May	After frost	90cm	July-Sept	Rose/pink/white tones	1.2m	A
Nigella	Miss Jeckyll	March-May	Direct	30cm	June-Sept	Blue	60cm	A
Orlaya	Snowballs	March-May	June	30cm	July-Oct	White	60cm	A
Rudbeckia	Marmalade	March-May			July-Oct	Gold with dark brown eyes	60cm	A
Rudbeckia	Aries x2	March-May			July-Oct	Yellow	75cm	A
Rudbeckia	Moreno	Feb-April	After frost	30cm	July-Sept	Orange with brown centres	50cm	A
Rudbeckia	Cherry Brandy x 2	Feb-April	After frost	40cm	July-Oct	Reddish	50cm	A
Scabious	Tall Double Mixed	March-May			July-Sept	Red/pink/violet/white	90cm	A

Flower	Variety	Sowing	Plant out	Spacing	Flowers	Colour	Height	A/ B/P
Statice	Special Mixed x3	Feb-April	After frost	20cm	June-Sept	Mixed pastel	60cm	A
Stock	Giant Perfection Mix	Feb-April	May	30cm	June-Sept	Mixed	45cm	A
Sunflower	Vanilla Ice	March-May	May-June	45cm	June-Sept	Pale yellow, chocolate centre	150cm	A
Sunflower	Teddy Bear	March-May	May-June	30cm	July-Sept	Golden yellow	40-60cm	A
Sunflower	Moonwalker	March-April	May-June	30cm	July-Sept	Orangey red	3m	A
Sunflower	Earthwalker	April-May	May-June	45cm	July-Sept	Brown and terracotta	2-3m	A
Sunflower	Sparky	March-May	After frost	30cm	July-Sept	Yellow, bronze, orange	1.2-1.5m	A
Sunflower	Giant Single	April-May	After frost	45cm	July-Sept	Yellow	2-3m	A
Sweet Peas	Mixed	Jan-April	April	10cm	June-Sept	Mixed	Climbing	A
Sweet Peas	Old Fashioned Mixed	Jan-May	May	10cm	June-Sept	Mixed	Climbing	A
Sweet Peas	Showbench Mixed	Jan-May	May	10cm	June-Sept	Mixed	Climbing	A
Sweet Peas	Mollie Rilestone	Jan-May	May	10cm	June-Sept	Cream edged with pink	Climbing	A
Sweet Peas	High Scent	Jan-May	May	10cm	June-Sept	Blush pink with lavender blue edge	Climbing	A
Sweet Peas	King Size Navy Blue	Jan-May	May	10cm	June-Sept	Blue	Climbing	A
Sweet Peas	Cupani	Jan-May	May	10cm	June-Sept	Red and pink	Climbing	A
Sweet Peas	Prince of Orange	Jan-May	May	10cm	June-Sept	Pinky orange	Climbing	A
Sweet Peas	Matacuna x3	Jan-May	May	10cm	June-Sept	Purple	Climbing	A
Sweet Peas	Promise	Jan-May	May	10cm	June-Sept	White and pink two tone	Climbing	A
Sweet peas	Wiltshire Ripple	Jan-May	May	10cm	June-Sept	White/ burgundy	Climbing	A
Sweet Peas	Su Pollard	Jan-May	May	7.5cm	June-Sept	Pink	Climbing	A
Sweet William	Perfume Mix	May-July	Sept-Oct	30cm	May-July	Mixed	45cm	B
Sweet William	Prettiness	May-July	Sept-Oct	20cm	June-Aug	Mixed		B
Tulips	Various				March-May		60cm	P
Verbena Bonariensis		N/A	N/A	N/A	June-Oct	Purple	90cm	P
Zinnia	Oklahoma	Mar-Apr	Late May			Mixed	75cm	A