

# Patch & Pot

## Cut Flowers: Arranging & Colour Guide

### Why Plan Colour?

Flowers bring more than fragrance and beauty. In a pot or border, colour can lift mood, calm the senses, or energise a dull space. Indoors, an arrangement on a table can soften a stressful day, act as a mindful pause, or reconnect you with the rhythm of the seasons. Thoughtful arranging avoids “clashing” tones and lets you harvest in harmony with the natural flow of your patch. Colour planning is not about rigid rules, but about knowing what each shade brings and how flowers interact in both garden and vase.

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### Colour Palettes and Mood

#### Pastel Meadow

- **Core flowers:** Cosmos *Apricot Lemonade*, Nigella (*Love-in-a-Mist*), pale pink Larkspur, white Scabiosa.
- **Accents:** Chive blossoms, airy dill, self-sown forget-me-nots, silvery grass seedheads.
- **Effect:** Gentle and nostalgic, like a soft watercolour. This palette is forgiving, even if flowers overlap or bloom unevenly, pastels blur into one another gracefully.

#### Hot & Happy

- **Core flowers:** Zinnias (especially bold reds and oranges), Rudbeckia, Calendula, bright Cosmos (*Diablo*).
- **Accents:** Marigolds, Amaranthus (hanging or upright), Celosia with flames of colour.
- **Effect:** A jolt of sunshine and energy. Works brilliantly in urban or concrete settings, where boldness helps cut through grey. Needs long, warm days to really shine, so later to peak in northern coasts.

#### Cool & Calm

- **Core flowers:** Cornflowers (blue), Cosmos ‘Purity’, pale blue Scabiosa, white Nigella.
- **Accents:** Nepeta, Salvia nemorosa, Lamb’s ear (soft foliage), airy Verbena bonariensis.
- **Effect:** Restful, like a breeze through linen. Ideal for shaded or north-facing areas, where deep reds would dull, but blues and whites remain luminous.

## Rich Autumnal

- **Core flowers:** Dahlias (burgundy, deep orange, burnt red), Chrysanthemums, Rudbeckia 'Cherry Brandy'.
  - **Accents:** Bronze fennel, seedheads of alliums or grasses, dark ivy trails.
  - **Effect:** Warming and grounding, perfect for the softer golden light of September–October.
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## Seasonal Rhythm

### Spring

- **Bulbs:** Tulips, Narcissus, Hyacinths, early Alliums.
- **Biennials:** Wallflowers, Sweet Williams, Forget-me-nots.
- **Tips:** Harvest tulips when the bud is still tight and just coloured, they will open in the vase. Narcissus release a sap that shortens other flowers' lives: keep them in a bucket on their own for a few hours before mixing.

### Summer

- **Annuals:** Sweet peas, Cosmos, Calendula, Snapdragons, Salvias.
- **Tips:** Pick sweet peas almost daily to keep them flowering. Snap off spent calendula heads to encourage new flushes. Cosmos need regular deadheading but are incredibly giving once established.

### Autumn

- **Showstoppers:** Dahlias, Rudbeckia, Salvias, Chrysanthemums, Sunflowers.
- **Tips:** Dahlias should be cut when blooms are fully open (they do not unfurl further in a vase). Keep water scrupulously clean, they are thirsty and prone to bacteria.

### Winter

- **Evergreen foliage:** Eucalyptus in pots, Holly with berries, Hebe, or Pine sprigs.
  - **Flowers:** Hellebores, Snowdrops, early Crocus, potted Hyacinths indoors.
  - **Tips:** Use branches and berries to give structure. Winter is about texture as much as colour.
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# The Bulb Lasagne Trick

Planting bulbs in layers brings months of joy from one pot:

- **Bottom:** Tall tulips or late alliums (20–25 cm).
- **Middle:** Narcissus or mid-season hyacinths (12–15 cm).
- **Top:** Crocus, Muscari, dwarf Iris (5–8 cm).
- **Bonus:** Plant violas, pansies, or winter lettuce right at the surface to keep the pot cheerful while bulbs are dormant.

Caveat: In wet western regions (Ireland west, Scottish west coast), raise pots on feet or use extra grit for drainage, bulbs rot easily in soggy soil.

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## Arranging by Vessel Size

### Mini Posies

For jam jars, bud vases, and bedside tables.

- Flowers: Sweet peas, Violas, Chive blossoms, Mint tips.
- Trick: Always remove lower leaves. Keep airy fillers (grasses, dill) for softness.

### Kitchen Jug Arrangements

The everyday favourite.

- Flowers: Cosmos, Snapdragons, Calendula, Salvias.
- Trick: Start with foliage or herbs, add 3–5 focal stems, then weave in filler stems. Odd numbers give natural rhythm.

### Statement Vases

For dramatic displays in dining rooms or halls.

- Flowers: Dahlias, Gladioli, Lilies.
  - Trick: Use chicken wire or florist's tape over the rim to hold stems upright. Work in layers of height: tallest at the back, medium in the middle, short and trailing at the front.
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## Conditioning and Longevity

- **Harvest early morning or evening** when stems are full of water.
  - **Buckets:** Always clean, filled with lukewarm water.
  - **Leaves:** Strip off any that would sit under water, rot sets in fast.
  - **Cut:** Re-cut stems under water to prevent air bubbles.
  - **Rest:** Let flowers drink for at least 2 hours in a cool place before arranging.
  - **Homemade preservative:** 1 tsp sugar, 1 tsp lemon juice, 1 drop bleach per litre of water.
  - **Refresh:** Change water every 2 days, re-cut stems slightly each time.
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## Regional & Climate Caveats

### Scotland

- **Far north & islands (Shetland, Orkney, Outer Hebrides, Caithness, Sutherland, Ross):** Delay sowing half-hardy annuals like cosmos and zinnias until June; fleece against late frosts. Sweet peas do well in cool summers, but dahlias need extra protection.
- **Central Belt & East Coast:** Earlier springs; tulips and narcissus can flower in March. East coast drier, so cosmos thrive.
- **West Coast:** Wetter summers, choose mildew-resistant sweet peas and give salvias raised pots with grit.

### England

- **South & South-East:** Long season, Mediterranean herbs and salvias overwinter. Dahlias often survive without lifting if mulched.
- **Midlands & East:** Reliable summers but watch for drought; mulch pots to reduce watering.
- **North England:** Shorter season, favour hardy perennials and early-flowering varieties.

### Wales

- **West Wales:** Mild winters but very wet; drainage crucial. Avoid bulb rot by using clay pots and sharp grit.
- **Snowdonia & inland north:** Shorter, cooler season; biennials like wallflowers excel.

### Ireland

- **West Coast:** Very mild winters but heavy rainfall, superb for fuchsias, salvias, hydrangeas, but tricky for tulips unless very well-drained.
  - **East & Midlands:** More reliable summers; tulips and dahlias thrive if mulched.
  - **Northern Ireland:** Cooler and later springs; cosmos and zinnias benefit from greenhouse or indoor start.
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## A Mindful Note

Flower arranging is not about creating a perfect magazine image. It is about noticing details, the way a cosmos bends towards light, the scent of a sweet pea as you trim it, the heavy glow of a dahlia head in October. Arranging becomes a practice of slowing down. Place a single bloom on a desk, a posy beside the bed, or a winter sprig on the kitchen table. Small gestures bring the same sense of connection as grand displays.



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