Flowers for Arrangements

IN THE GARDEN for June 2014 by Felicia Benes, Nebraska Statewide Arboretum

What better way to decorate than with an arrangement made from your own perennials, woody cut florals and ornamental grasses? A rose bouquet or bundle of peonies is the standard but let’s be resourceful and make an arrangement that is unique and that we can gather from our own yard whenever we want.

Woody cut florals are one way to give yourself that option. Woody florals are shrubs or trees with colorful or unusual shaped stems, buds, flowers, berries or bark collected for use in arrangements, where they can add remarkable color, texture and form.

Ornamental grasses can add neutral colors and a variety of different textures to arrangements. Cut in the fall, they add fall color to arrangements. When ornamental grasses are dried, they can look completely different than fresh, and they can last for years.

It’s worthwhile to grow ornamental grasses, woody flowering shrubs and perennial flowering plants in your landscape. They’re a lovely and inexpensive way to brighten up the landscape outdoors, and they also can be pruned and used for arrangements inside. Depending on how much pruning you will be doing, you might want to consider having a cutting garden that is somewhat hidden in the landscape. This way you can cut as much as you want from the plants without worrying how your landscape looks. Ornamental grasses don’t need to be hidden because they need to be cut back each year anyway.

Try growing plants that aren’t grown by all of your neighbors. Add some diversity and create a trend, experiment with new plants whenever the opportunity arises. Plant choices can be made strategically to provide interest throughout the year; which means arrangements can be cut through most of the year. Below are some plants that work well in cut arrangements.

Woody cut florals for twigs, flowers or berries (the following plants can grow higher than 5 feet): Forsythia; Winterberry or Ilex verticillata; American cranberrybush or Viburnum opulus; red chokeberry or Aronia arbutifolia; dragon’s claw willow or Salix matsudana ‘Tortuosa’; red twig dogwood or Cornus sericea ‘Farrow’. Or, growing less than 5 feet high: blue mist spirea or Caryopteris.

For seed pods: Blue false indigo; poppy; Mexican hat coneflower; milkweed.

Fresh cut florals: western sunflower or Helianthus occidentalis; Fireworks goldenrod or Solidago rugosa ‘Fireworks’; blazing star or Liatris; purple coneflower or Echinacea purpurea; feverfew or Tanacetum; stargazer lily.

Ornamental Grasses: Ravenna grass; Korean feather reed grass; little bluestem; sand lovegrass; Indiangrass; Canada wildrye.