

The Garden Gate
by Elizabeth Lacy

Red Hot Flowers for Your Summer Garden

Summertime gardens are a blaze of color—and red is certainly at the brightest end of the spectrum. Whether you want to turn your garden into a fiery festival or just plant a few sparklers, here are five suggestions from Dahlias who love to see red.

Red Hot Poker Lily



The Magnolia Manor’s prize-winning garden features this stunning plant. Red hot poker lilies (*Kniphofia*) aren’t true lilies, but that doesn’t keep them from being a showstopper in bright red, orange, and yellow. Bessie’s pokers are 3-4 feet tall, but you can find dwarf cultivars that are just a foot or two high. These specimen plants love the sun, good soil, and a little moisture, but once established they like it dry. Bessie says that it’s a good idea to keep an eye on them: they grow from rhizomes and can get a bit thuggish. She also warns that starting them from seed takes patience, so she hopes you can find a friend with a few pass-alongs or a friendly nursery. Oh, and the hummingbirds, bees, and butterflies love them—deer, not so much.

Red Poppy



As far as Aunt Hetty is concerned, the redder the better—and red poppies (*Papaver rhoeas*) are the best of the best. She says that growing them is as easy as tossing out of a few seeds or dividing a clump in autumn. They don't mind poor soil (as long as it's not soggy). For the best bloom, be a persistent deadheader. But ease up on the water once they've made themselves at home—too much moisture makes them leggy. Aunt Hetty also reminds us that the red poppy is also called the Remembrance Poppy. It has been a symbol of lives lost to war since the Great War (1914–1918).

Bleeding Hearts



Ophelia, a romantic at heart, loves these attention-getting, heart-shaped blossoms, displayed gracefully on arching stems. The attractive bluish-green foliage of *Dicentra spectabilis* emerges in early spring, followed by its attention-getting, heart-shaped flowers—red, pink, magenta, white—displayed on arching stems. They love a compost-rich, moist soil, cool shade, and a dose of plant food. Summer is not their favorite season, so expect them to die back when it gets hot. Divide the clumps every few years and share with your best friends.

Celosia



Fannie Champaign, moderately famous milliner and proprietor of Champaign's Darling Chapeaux, has used dried celosia in her hat décor. "It's gorgeous," she says. "It'll brighten your parlor all winter long." You'll also enjoy this annual flower (an amaranth) from early summer until frost, especially if you use it

as a bedding plant, where the vibrant color can make a strong showing. Some varieties have a bronze-green foliage, too, making for an even better color contrast. What's more, the leaves and young stems can be sautéed, like spinach. (Nice to know in hard times.) Start with purchased seedling or sow seeds indoors in late winter. Transplant into compost-enriched, sun-warmed soil in a dry corner. Celosia appreciates a good drink but it doesn't like wet feet.

Hibiscus



Earlynne Fowler is a fan of the big, hollyhock-like flowers of the hibiscus--“some of them almost as big as a dinner plate!” she says. She has several large plants (almost 8 feet tall) in her garden, and dwarf varieties as well. She's started them both from seed and from cuttings (from other Dahlia friends). She says that a good mulch helps to keep them moist and provides some winter protection (they'll die back). Deadhead for a strong re-bloom and mulch around the plant to retain moisture and to provide winter protection for the roots.

Hibiscus tea is a year-round favorite at the Fowler house. To make one cup from the fresh flowers, Earlynne removes the flower base and the stamens from 3-4 large flowers. She rinses the petals to remove any dust, then puts them in a bowl and covers with 1 cup of boiling water. (If you like, add mint and/or crushed cinnamon, cloves, cardamom.) Steep for 8-10 minutes. Sweeten with honey.