

Local Cut Flowers – A Niche Market



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Local cut flowers are gaining popularity among growers. This e-GRO Alert shares insights from a southeast U.S. consumers study addressing local cut flower preferences.

Local production is a hot topic in the food and ornamental plant industries. Local cut flowers are of particular interest given recent demand and potential to grow the crop in limited spaces. Here, we summarize key results from a 2025 study led by the University of Tennessee that addressed southeast U.S. customers' preferences for local cut flowers (Fig. 1).

A total of 708 southeast U.S. cut flower purchasers participated in the study. Participating states included Tennessee, North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Kentucky and Mississippi. Participants were asked their overall perceptions of local cut flowers and past purchasing behaviors. Additionally, they were shown six cut flower images and asked to select the correct flower name (from four options).



Figure 1. Zinnia in University of Tennessee Cut Flower Trials, summer 2025.

Photo credit: A. Rihn

The flower images included cornflower, zinnia, lisianthus, yarrow, snapdragon and dahlia (Fig. 2). Over half of the participants (67%) had purchased locally grown cut flowers in 2024. They primarily purchased local cut flowers from grocery stores, independent florists, and farmers markets. Color was rated as the most important feature (4.4 out of 5 points; 1=very unimportant, 5=very important), followed by price, availability, and fragrance (Fig. 3). The main barriers to purchase were price (selected by 48% of the sample) and low availability (44%).

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Most of the purchases (59%) were planned while 41% were impulse purchases. Purchases that were planned were primarily for special occasions (e.g., birthday, Mother’s Day, Valentine’s Day) while the impulse purchases were often “just because.”

On average, participants spent \$30.03 on local cut flowers at each purchase event, but most participants indicated the prices ranged between \$5 and \$75. In terms of cut flowers that participants perceived as being local, 84% of participants selected sunflowers, 79% roses, 71% tulips, 70% daffodils, 50% zinnias, and 17% lisianthus (Fig. 4).

When asked to identify the cut flower types, on average, participants correctly identified 2.2 flowers out of the six options. Figure 1 shows the flower images while Figure 5 and Table 1 show the results. Snapdragons were the most recognized with 48% of the sample correctly identifying the flowers, while the most selected incorrect answer was gladiolas (36% of the sample selected this option), followed by delphiniums, and stock. Next, dahlia was correctly identified by 44% of participants, while 37% incorrectly identified it as mums, followed by peonies, and ranunculus. Cornflower was correctly identified by 38% of the sample, while 33% misidentified the flower as violas, followed by cosmos and carnations. Zinnias were correctly identified by 31% of the sample, however the majority of the sample assumed they were marigolds (63%) followed by scabiosa and sunflowers. Lisianthus was correctly identified by 31% of the sample with 35% indicating the flower as a carnation, followed by rose, and celosia. Lastly, yarrow was correctly identified by 25% of the sample, but 47% incorrectly identified it as Queen Anne’s lace, followed by baby’s breath and fennel.

Demographics and purchase location impacted participants cut flower identification skills. Specifically, individuals who were women, had a higher education level, or had a higher household income were able to correctly identify more cut flowers. Additionally, if participants purchased the cut flowers from a farmers market or community supported agriculture (CSA) they were more likely to correctly identify the flowers. Conversely, those who bought cut flowers from grocery stores or mass merchandisers (e.g., Target, Walmart, etc.) were less likely to correctly identify the types of flowers shown.



Figure 2. Images of Local Cut Flowers (upper left to right: cornflower, yarrow, dahlia; lower left to right: zinnia, snapdragon, yarrow).

Photo credit: C. Scott & N. Bumgarner

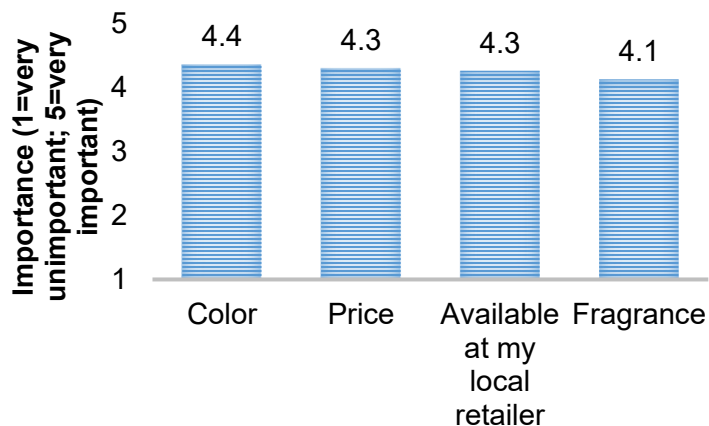


Figure 3. Important Cut Flower Features (n=708).

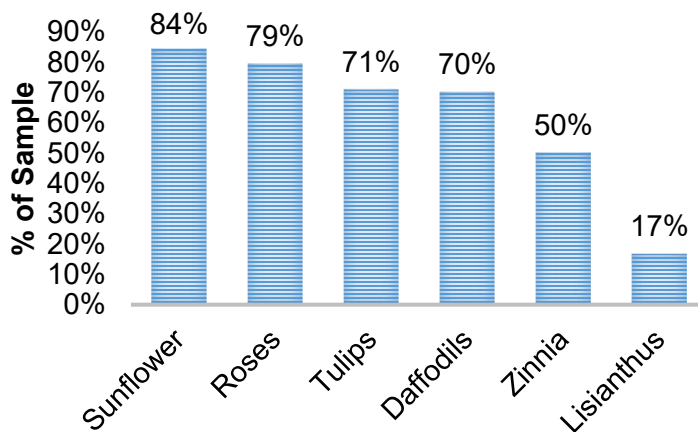


Figure 4. Customers Perceived Local Cut Flower Types (n=708).

Together, the results have several practical implications. Specifically:

- Participants indicated relatively low awareness of the different specific types of cut flowers but there was a high prevalence of similar aesthetic features with the top selected incorrect option. For example, the snapdragons and gladiolas have similar flower structures (e.g., vertical), lisianthus and carnations have similar petal composition and shape, and zinnia and marigold displayed a similar color (orange).
- Given that color was the primary feature of interest among customers (Fig. 3), cut flower substitutions are likely acceptable by end customers provided that the aesthetic is similar. This is more prevalent when the flowers are bought “just because” or impulse purchases than for planned occasions where a specific flower type may be desired (e.g., Mother’s Day and mom has a favorite flower).
- Common reference prices were between \$5 and \$75. Using a tiered price strategy where different sized bouquets at different prices may capture additional sales. For instance, providing lower priced, smaller bouquets for “just because” impulse purchasers and larger, higher priced options for more specialized or planned purchase occasions. Using a tiered pricing strategy also reduces the price barrier for customers who have different reference prices.

- Convenience and availability are important to customers. Advertise where local cut flowers are available and when people can purchase them. Consider locations or options where customers frequent to increase convenience.
- Consider ways to improve impulse / “just because” purchases (e.g., easy to transport packaging, retail options, delivery options).
- Promote local cut flowers as a unique, special occasion gift. No two products are identical, and they can be customized to the gift recipient.
- There is an opportunity to educate customers about the types of flowers available, retail locations where they are available, and the different benefits they provide in the southeast U.S. to help generate value for customers and producers alike.

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Table 1. Local Cut Flower Identification Incorrect Substitute Results (n=708).

	Snapdragon	Dahlia	Cornflower	Zinnia	Lisianthus	Yarrow
Closest substitute (% selected)	Gladiolas (36%)	Mums (37%)	Violas (33%)	Marigold (63%)	Carnation (35%)	Queen Anne’s Lace (47%)
Second closest substitute (% selected)	Delphinium (12%)	Peony (16%)	Cosmos (15%)	Scabiosa (3%)	Rose (20%)	Baby’s breath (15%)
Third closest substitute (% selected)	Stock (3%)	Ranunculus (4%)	Carnation (14%)	Sunflower (2%)	Celosia (14%)	Fennel (13%)

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