



## **Cut Flower & Greenhouse Newsletter**

Central Maryland Research and Education Center  
Ellicott City, Maryland

**May 20, 2026**

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### **Happy May! An Extra Special Month for Cut Flower Growers**

Laura Nixon

Happy May and Happy Mother's Day to those who celebrate! This month, we are celebrating all the beautiful bouquets that were gifted for this holiday; thank you to everyone who contributed photos. Of course, our cut flower growers are acutely aware of the Mother's Day rush, but I wanted to check out what market research is showing. Several studies have shown that Mother's Day is the number one reason for consumers to purchase cut flowers in the US, with roses, lilies, tulips, and carnations being the most popular nationwide flowers. I did manage to find one economic paper that mentioned some of our home-grown favorites, including dahlias, zinnias, peonies, and snapdragons. But the best information gleaned from my reading is a quote that aligns with many of our feelings when standing in a field of flowers:

*“Consumers’ overall mood, household mood, stress reduction, and workplace morale were perceived benefits of having flowers.”*

– Campbell and Campbell, 2025  
HortTechnology

**June 23, 2026 IPM Scouts' Diagnostic Session**

**Time: 12:30 - 3:00**

**Location: CMREC, Ellicott City**

The link to register for this program is on our [Conferences' web page](#)



### Local Mother's Day Flower Arrangements

Photos: Laura Nixon, Dave Clement, Kelly Piccioni, Sheena O'Donnell,



### Flower of the Month

Krystal Snyder

Petunia Dekko™ 'Maxx™ Pink' from Syngenta Flowers impresses in trials: this bright pink selection demonstrates excellent habit, withstands summer storms beautifully, and thrives in both containers and landscape plantings. As an outstanding introduction, it earned a perfect 5.0 score in both 2024 and 2025 trials.



**Petunia Dekko™ 'Maxx™ Pink'**

Photo: Krystal Snyder

## Designing with Purpose: Representing American Grown Flowers at the 113th First Lady's Luncheon

Kelly Piccioni

This spring, I had the honor of returning to Washington, D.C. for my second appointment as a designer and ambassador with the Certified American Grown design team for the 113th First Lady's Luncheon hosted by the The Congressional Club. Selected as one of only 24 floral designers and flower farm representatives from more than 120 applicants nationwide, I joined an incredible team of growers, designers, educators, and advocates to create immersive floral installations showcasing exclusively American-grown flowers and foliage. This year's theme, Celebrating 1776... with Georgia on My Mind, carried an elevated sense of patriotism as America approaches its 250th anniversary, while also highlighting the beauty and importance of domestic horticultural products.

Led by Jennifer Reed of Jennifer Designs Events, the design concept drew inspiration from the landscapes and gardens of the American South. Magnolia foliage served as a defining design element throughout the ballroom, layered with smilax vines, hellebores, spray roses, California garden roses, ranunculus, spirea, and flowering branches to create lush, garden-inspired installations. One of the most memorable moments was a special nod to Augusta and the Masters Tournament through a botanical interpretation inspired by Hogan's Bridge featuring flowering dogwood and masses of azalea blooms, celebrating Georgia's horticultural identity and landscape heritage.

As a Penn State Extension Horticulture Educator serving Schuylkill County, the experience represented far more than floral design alone. My work directly with Christmas tree growers, nursery producers, floriculture businesses, greenhouse operations, cut flower farms, and



**The experience represented far more than floral design alone.**

Photo: Haley Richter Photography

foliage growers across Pennsylvania made the event especially meaningful as a platform to advocate for American-grown flowers, ornamental horticulture, specialty crops, and domestic agriculture. Throughout the week, there was a shared hope among the team that America's 250th celebration would help strengthen appreciation and support for American-grown horticultural products and the growers who make them possible.



**Magnolia foliage served as a defining design element**

Photo: Haley Richter Photography



**This year's theme was 'Celebrating 1776 with Georgia on My Mind'**

Photo: Haley Richter Photography

## Peonies as Cut Flowers

Ginny Rosenkranz

Peonies are herbaceous perennials that are grown for their beautiful flowers that often bloom around Mother's Day. They thrive in USDA zones 5-7 but will grow in USDA zones 3-8, making them very versatile. Low-chill types grow best in zone 8, but the plants should not have the crowns of the plants planted more than 1 inch deep and do not apply mulch in the winter. In Maryland Peonies thrive in full sun but often prefer some late afternoon shade. They should be planted in deep fertile soils that are well drained, and commercial growers often grow them in raised beds. They also require good air circulation around the plants. Peonies can live long lives, often growing and blooming for over 50-100 years. Most are from Europe, western and eastern Asia. There are actually 2 species of peonies that are native to western North America. As herbaceous perennials, the foliage dies in late fall, and new sturdy foliage emerges in the spring and stays attractive all through the summer. In the spring the large and often fragrant flowers begin to bloom.

Commercial growers usually harvest the flowers when they are in 'marshmallow stage', when the buds are soft to touch but before the flowers actually begin to open. The bud will feel slightly soft and the petal colors are visible through the green sepals. Harvesting the peonies too early may prevent the flowers from opening indoors while harvesting too late always shortens the vase life of the flowers, usually causing the blooms to shatter after 2-3 days in water. They are usually harvested in the early morning after the dew has dried, or in the late evening when the temperatures are cooler. The pruners should be cleaned and sharpened daily, and the cut should be on a diagonal to increase the amount of water the cut flowers can take up. When pruning the flowers, be sure to leave 2-3 sets of leaves on the plant which helps with photosynthesis, helps the roots and helps support the next year's blooms. The peony flower buds exude sugar which attracts many insects including ants, which led to the thought that ants were needed to help the peony flowers to bloom. In fact, they are just harvesting sugars to feed their young. To prevent insects on cut flowers, submerge the stems and flower buds in cool water for a few seconds until the insects are off the plants. Once the flowers are placed in a vase, the water should be changed every 2 days, and the bottom of the stems should be re-cut at an angle under water to prevent air bubbles from rising in the stems.



**Peonies should be planted in deep fertile soils that are well drained.**

Photo: Bert Klotz



**In Maryland peonies thrive in full sun but often prefer some late afternoon shade.**

Photo: Bert Klotz

## Early Season Aphid Management

Patricia Prade

As temperatures warm and plants begin to put on new growth, aphids are one of the key pests growers should keep on their radar. Aphids are especially attracted to tender, actively growing plant tissue, where they feed on plant sap. When left unchecked, populations can increase rapidly and lead to distorted growth, sticky honeydew buildup, sooty mold development, and, in some cases, the transmission of plant viruses.

Now is a good time to begin implementing biological control as an early and effective management strategy. Beneficial insects such as brown and green lacewings can help suppress aphid populations before outbreaks occur. Additional management options include insecticidal soaps and horticultural oils, such as PureSpray Green and SuffOil-X, which can provide effective control when good coverage is achieved. If populations become high, insecticides such as cyantraniliprole (e.g., Mainspring) may be needed. Since aphids reproduce quickly, early intervention is critical. Thorough coverage of leaf undersides and growing points is essential for successful management. Whenever possible, select products that are softer on beneficial insects, as natural enemies such as lady beetles, lacewings, and parasitoid wasps can play an important role in naturally suppressing aphid populations.



**Aphids on tweedia, clustered around new tender growth**

Photo: Margaret Pickoff, Penn State Extension

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## Scouting

Patricia Prade

As temperatures warm and pest activity increases, regular scouting becomes one of the most important tools for early pest detection and successful management. Whenever possible, scouting should be done weekly or bi-weekly to catch problems before populations become difficult and expensive to control. Although checking 5–10% of all plant varieties using plant taps and visual inspections may seem time-consuming, early detection can greatly reduce future management costs and plant losses. Be sure to inspect under leaves, growing tips, flowers, and areas close to the soil surface, where many pests often hide and begin establishing populations. Consistent scouting helps growers make informed management decisions and respond before outbreaks occur.



**Regular tap tests are part of a good scouting routine**

Photo: Patricia Prade, Penn State Extension

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**Conferences** - Go to the [IPMnet Conference Page](#) for links and details on these programs.

June 16 2026 - **Eastern Shore Procrastinator's Conference** (all day)  
Location: Zoom

June 23 / July 22 / August 26 2026 - **IPM Scouts' Diagnostic Sessions** (1 - 3 PM)  
Location: CMREC, Ellicott City, MD



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