

Cutting and Conditioning Flowers

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Tips for Cut Flowers

- Flowers for arrangements can be taken from flowering trees, shrubs, perennials, bulbs, and annuals. Annuals are some of the best candidates for cut flowers since they produce lots of flowers over a long season.
- Your vegetable garden is a great place to grow flowers for cutting: it will be more beautiful and you won't ruin your flower garden by cutting the flowers just as they are about to open.
- Variety makes for interesting arrangements: mix flowers with different colors, sizes, shapes, and textures. Foliage can play an important role in arrangements. Ferns, ornamental grasses, hostas, and other leaves make wonderful additions to any bouquet.
- When cutting flowers, take branches from the back side of shrubs and large perennials. With annuals and smaller plants, try to cut just a few flowers from each plant rather than taking all your flowers from one spot.
- Some perennials that are to be used for cut flowers can be pinched back in the late spring (May–June) to delay flowering. Pinch some and let others flower early and you'll have more flowers over a longer season. Asters, chrysanthemums, bee balm, sneezeweed, balloon flowers, and phlox can be pinched. Bulbs such as gladiolus can be planted in two-week intervals to extend their flowering season.
- For some perennials such as asters and phlox, thinning out the weaker stems early in the season gives you a nice healthy plant. You'll get more strong stems, larger flower heads, and a sturdier plant. Flowers with strong, tall stems make the best cut flowers.
- Most flowers can be cut when their buds begin to show color. There are a few exceptions: dahlias, phlox, zinnias, marigolds, and chrysanthemums should be cut when the flowers are fully open.

Tips for Cutting Flowers

- Cut flowers in the morning.
- Take a bucket of cool or lukewarm water with you and put the flowers in the bucket as soon as they are cut.
- If you cut flowers of different sizes, take out two buckets and separate the small and large flowers so that the small flowers aren't crushed. Cutting flowers of different sizes and heights makes for interesting arrangements. Use a sharp knife or scissors to make your cut.
- Once indoors or in a cool, shaded area of your garden, remove the foliage from the lower portion of the stem. Decaying leaves will contaminate the water and shorten the vase life of your flowers.
- Either hold the stems under the water and cut an additional inch off the stem, or re-cut and place immediately in water. The reason for cutting stems under water is to prevent air locks from forming.
- Change water frequently and re-cut the stems if flowers start to wilt.
- Use a vase that has been cleaned with soap and water. Add a few drops of household bleach to clean tough stains.

- Flower arrangements last longer if displayed out of direct sunlight and away from heat.

Tips for Conditioning Flowers

- The most important rule for conditioning flowers is to let them stand in a cool place out of direct sunlight in tepid water for several hours—preferably overnight. Add some cut-flower food. This will extend their bloom time by several days.
- Cut all stems on a 45-degree angle. You are increasing the surface area for the water to get to the flower.
- Woody stemmed branches from flowering trees and shrubs need to have the ends of their stems split. Split the bottom of each stem by making a ½ to one-inch vertical cut.
- For long-lasting hydrangeas, submerge them in a bowl of cold water (head down) for one hour to help firm their petals. Let the flowers drip dry, cut their stems at a 45-degree angle, and place stems in warm water overnight.
- Daffodils exude a clear sap that can kill other flowers. Cut these flowers and soak them separately in a vase for one hour before adding them to your arrangements. Warning: the sap can be a skin irritant.
- Cut off the thick white section on the bottom of the stems of bulbs for better water absorption.
- Some plants such as spurge, blood flower, and poinsettia contain a milky sap that can also be a skin irritant. To condition these flowers, sear the end with a match or dunk in boiling water for 15 seconds.
- Plants with thin stems that tend to bend are best bundled together and left to sit for several hours in water before being placed in an arrangement. Tulips are a classic example.
- Another tip for tulips if they start to droop is to take a pin and prick a small hole in the stem just below the flower. I gave this tip to my mother and she now swears by it.
- Some flowers such as delphiniums, lupines, and amaryllis have hollow stems. Place a thin stick or wire up the stems or fill the stems with water and cover with a cotton ball at the base bound by a rubber band.
- Cut carnations between the nodes on the stem for better water conduction.
- Floral preservative always helps to extend the life of your bouquet. For a homemade recipe try 1 teaspoon of sugar, 1 teaspoon of household bleach and 2 teaspoons of lemon juice per 1 quart of lukewarm water. The sugar is food, the bleach keeps it clean and the lemon juice keeps it acidic which helps with the uptake of water.

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