

Working with Fresh Flowers

Selecting Flowers

Whether you purchase cut flowers, grow your own or gather them from a field, select blooms that are full of life. You can tell just by looking at them if they are going to stand tall and strut their stuff, or droop and drop their petals by the time you put them in a [vase](#).

Hints:

Purchase (or cut) firm, plump flowers.

They should be free of disease and insects.

Look for unbroken, clean stems.

Healthy leaves indicate a healthy plant.

Select buds showing color.

Life-Prolonging Techniques

Flowers are composed of 90% water. Water keeps the flowers firm, fresh and alive. Water dissolves and transports nutrients throughout the plant. Facilitating the maximum flow of water and nutrients is the secret to longer lasting flowers.

Flowers require a healthy environment to live long and prosper. They need to be in clean [containers](#); free from bacteria that clogs the stems and prevents circulation of water and nutrients. Vases and storage containers need to be scrubbed and rinsed with a mild solution of Clorox before or after each use. Flowers also require clean air. An arrangement placed by an open window where traffic is heavy, or in a room where people are smoking will not last as long as one placed in a well-ventilated environment. Just as pollutants inhibit the health and life of birds, fish and animals, they diminish the beauty and life of cut flowers.

Cut flowers and arrangements respond to the temperature of the water. Warm water encourages buds and closed flowers to open, and cool temperatures slow down development, adding longevity to the arrangement. Excessive hot or cold water causes plant damage. Flowers droop and wilt when placed in hot water and die quickly in very cold water.

Cut flowers require the proper kind and correct amount of nourishment. Floral preservatives are special mixtures of chemicals that have been developed and perfected to prolong the life of flowers. They contain a sugar base to keep the flower's energy level high, ingredients to inhibit the growth of bacteria and chemicals that lower the pH factor thereby enhancing water uptake. There are many brands of preservatives available in both liquid and powder form. They can be purchased at florist shops, craft stores and at many markets. Follow the instructions carefully. Do not use a little more or a little less. Some flowers are naturally short-lived (3-4 days), while others can last two weeks or more. Using flower

preservatives is a life-prolonging tool for the serious flower arranger.
arranger.

Some hints:

- Always cut your flower stems under running water. It will preserve them longer and give them a longer vase life.
- You should not remove the leaves on mums when arranging them. The leaves keep the flower fresher longer.
- Full strength lemon juice misted on gardenias will prevent them from browning.
- When arranging gardenias and stephenotis, always wet your hands first, the oil from your hands will turn the flowers brown.
- When using tulips in a bridal bouquet: let the tulips sit in a vase until the flower has opened to the look you want. You can now dip the head of the tulip in egg white and this will prevent the flower from opening any further.
- Be careful when adding daffodils with other flowers in the same vase. The fresh cut daffodils can cause the other flowers to wilt earlier.

Flower Arranging 101-Working with Fresh Flowers

Pre-Arranging Fresh Flowers

Pre-Arranging Treatment

In order to destroy bacteria from previous plants, scrub plastic buckets and vases with detergent and rinse thoroughly. Rinse again with a mild solution of bleach; one cap full per gallon of water. Bacteria from unclean containers are a primary cause of short-lived arrangements. They clog the stems preventing the life-giving water from reaching the head of the flower and nourishing the complete plant. Plastic storage containers are preferable to metal ones, because the metal can interact negatively with preservatives and shorten plant life.

Fill a clean, plastic storage bucket half full of bottled or purified water and the proper amount of preservatives. It is important to use purified or bottled water, because the chemicals and hard minerals in tap water block the flow of water in the stems. Allow the water to sit for a half hour so trapped air can be released, and so the water can reach room temperature.

Trim off all broken, dying, diseased, wilted or damaged flowers and leaves. This is preparation for arranging as well as for cleaning off bacteria producing plant material. Remove the lower leaves from the stems.

Make the stem ends even, then hold them several inches underwater. Cut 1" from the bottom of the stems. Make sure your cutting tools are sharp. A water droplet will form on the end of the stems and prevent air bubbles from entering and blocking the flow of water when you transfer the flowers to the storage bucket.

Flowers need to hydrate in a preservative solution to replace moisture lost during cutting and handling. Let the flowers stand and balance themselves in the storage bucket. Keep them in a cool, well-ventilated place (never in direct sun) while they drink up the preservative through freshly cut stems. Allow to sit for six hours or so (or overnight) before placing them in their "designer home". This nourishing treatment step maximizes solution uptake and greatly enhances the life of the flowers.

A florist stores flowers in a special cooler that has a constant temperature, a humidifier and fans to circulate the air and moisture. Home refrigerators are not suitable for storing flowers.

As individual flowers die, remove them to keep the arrangement looking fresh and to direct the energy of the flower to the development of emerging buds. Sometimes, if a flower has wilted, or looks a little "tired", shorten the stem, remove some of the foliage, and put it in a smaller vase. Avoid getting water on the leaves and flowers.

Special Treatments

Semi-woody stemmed flowers like hydrangeas, clematis, helleborus, poppies etc., exude a sticky sap. The sap pollutes the water and kills the other flowers. The stems need to be cauterized in order to seal in the sap. Immerse the fresh cut stem ends in boiling water for ten seconds, or hold them over a candle flame until the ends are sealed. Water will be absorbed through the cell walls of the stems. Solid woody stems that do not exude sap do not require cauterization. They need to be mashed to maximize water uptake.

Daffodils, narcissus, crocus and hyacinth also exude sap that is poisonous to other flowers. The stems are too fragile to cauterize. They need to be hydrated in separate containers for 6-8 hours before adding them to a bouquet.

Some flowers benefit from total immersion in cool water, if they have been left out of water for a few hours. They drink the moisture through their cell walls and regain their composure. Roses, peonies, lilies, wilted violets, wild flowers and especially tropical flowers rebound stronger than ever with a tepid bath before being placed in a storage container for hydration in a preservative solution.

Tulips that have curled up can be straightened by carefully placing them upright in a tall, straight vase and adding a couple of pennies to the water.

To perk up roses when their heads begin to droop, take them out of the arrangement and place them in a tepid bath for an hour or so. Cut an inch off the stems under water before putting them back in a clean vase.

When using growing plants in an arrangement, submerge the whole plant in tap water to clean the leaves and roots. Then, hydrate them in a preservative solution before adding them to your arrangement.

Taking the time to trim off dying plant material and leaves beneath the water line, cutting the stems under water, and allowing the flowers to hydrate in a preservative solution before arranging them in a vase, will add significantly to the life and beauty of your arrangement.

Helpful Hints for Fresh Flowers

- Scour containers with a plastic pot cleaner, brush or sponge and rinse with a mild solution of chlorine bleach.
- Remove all leaves and foliage below the water line. They decay quickly, have an acrid odor and distract from the design.
- Cut stems under water.
- Cut ends of stems on a slant. Crush the ends of thick stems.
- To change the water in a cut flower arrangement place the vase in a sink or bucket and add purified water until the vase overflows and the water runs clear. The life of the arrangement will be significantly extended by not exposing the stems to air.

Flower arrangement by [Ron Morgan](#) from [In the Company of Flowers](#)

The Art of Arranging Flowers: Flower Arranging with Fresh Flowers

Wiring & Taping Techniques

Professional flower designers wire and tape stems for a good reason. Many flowers have heavy heads and need the extra support including roses. If you do not wire and tape them they will eventually start to droop.

You can extend the length of a flower easily, with wires and taping, so that it works in your arrangement.

Once cut flowers are wired you should tape them with florist tape to hold the moisture that is in the stem. And the tape conceals the wires.

Dried flowers and sometimes silks are covered with florist tape to ensure that the material does not slip out of a wired mount

Lengthening a stem (Wiring Techniques)

Having the ability to lengthen a flower stem is a great advantage in flower arranging. Also, if the flower has two or more blossoms, you can cut off the blooms and give each flower a new stem. It is a money saver and provides other possibilities when arranging flowers. This technique can be used on fresh, silk or dried flowers.

Taping and Lengthening a stem

1. Place a stem wire next to the flower stem. Hold the wire near its top. Wrap a piece of floral tape around the top of the wire and flower stem.
2. Twirl the stem while stretching and pulling the tape in a downward angle. The tape should be tightly wrapped around the wire and flower stem without buckles or gaps along the stem.
3. While taping the stem you may wish to add further stems setting the flower heads at different heights.
4. Fasten off just above the end of the wires by squeezing the tape against itself.

Making a Stay Wire

1. Group together four florist wires. Have each overlap the next by 1-1/4".
2. Start taping the wires together from the one end.
3. As the tape reaches the end of the first wire add another wire to the remaining three ends of wires and continue taping. And so on. Adding wires and taping four together until you achieve the required length.

Pierce method

This wiring method is perfect for roses

To give support to a weak flower head with a thick calyx beneath the flower head, insert an 18-gauge stem wire.

1. Push one end of the wire horizontally through the calyx using half the length of the wire.
2. Bend both ends down parallel with the stem. Tape the wire starting just above the insertion.

Note: A second wire may be inserted through the flower so that the two wires are crisscrossed for heavier flower heads.

Hook method

This method works well if the flower head is firmly attached to the stem.

1. Cut the flower stem an inch from the bottom of the calyx. Insert the stem wire inside the center of the stem up into the flower head until it is secure.
2. Form a hook, and pull the wire back down through the flower.
3. Tape the stem and wire tightly.

Single & Double Leg Mount

Single Leg Mount

This is for wiring flowers which have a strong stem or where a double weight of wire is not necessary.

1. Hold the flowers between your thumb and index finger letting the weight of the flower lay across the top of your hand. Position a wire behind the stem one third the way up.
2. Now bend the wire ends together -with one leg shorter than the other.
3. Holding the short wire leg parallel with the stem, wrap the long wire leg around both the stem and the other wire leg.
4. Straighten the long wire.

Double Leg Mount

Similar to the single leg mount but the double leg mount will lengthen the stem with two equal length floral wires.

1. Start by holding the flower between your thumb and index finger. Allow the weight of the flower to lay across the top of your hand.
2. Position a wire 1/3 the way up from the bottom of the stem. Note: 1/3 of the wire should be to one side of the stem.
3. Bend the wire parallel to the stem. One leg of the wire will be about twice as long as the other.

4. Hold the shorter leg against the stem and wrap the longer length of wire around both the stem and the other wire to secure.

5. Straighten both the wires legs which should now be equal length. See illustration above for finished look.

Stem supports for heavy flower heads

A must for roses which have a woody stem that when bent will cause the flower to wilt. This will reinforce them and make them ready for arranging.

Flower supports add strength and flexibility to the stem allowing the flower to be gently bent.

1. Insert the end of a stem wire vertically into the base of the calyx.
2. Loosely wrap the wire around the full length of the stem in a spiral. Tape the stem to cover the wire.

Wiring a rose bud

Quite necessary if you are attempting more complex floral designs with roses. You will be replacing the rose stem with a wire so this arrangement would be perfect for drying.

Use this style of wiring for floral head pieces .

1. Cut the stem of the rose to 1-1/4" . Push one end of a floral wire through the seed-box (bottom of rose-thickest part) at the side. Holding the head of the rose in one hand wrap the wire firmly around and then down the stem.
2. Straighten the remaining wire to extend the the length of its natural stem. Cover the wire with florist tape.

Wireless taping

Wireless Taping is a perfect technique for free flowing hairpieces or corsages.

1. Cut the stem to 1" long.
2. Wrap a piece of floral tape around the top of the stem and twirl the flower in one hand while twisting the tape lightly around itself until it is as long as you want it. If you need more support, tape it again.

Flower arrangement by [Ron Morgan](#) from [In the Company of Flowers](#)

Designing with Fresh Flowers/ Holding Cut Flowers In Place

[Waterproof tape](#). Flowers casually placed in a clear glass vase have been a popular style for many years. To create a more elaborate, formal arrangement, make a grid at the top of the container out of waterproof tape. The clear tape grid pattern is an excellent method used by professionals.

[Floral Netting](#) or Chicken wire can also be used to hold stems in place. Bend the edges of the wire over and into the foam inside the vase. If you aren't using foam, bend the chicken wire to the inside lip of the vase.

Crumpled chicken wire and a pin holder ([frogs](#)) provide a good grid for small stem fresh flowers. Slip the flower stems in place through the wire.

Lead crossbar slings can be purchased at florist supply stores. They are placed on the top of the container and held in place with lightweight florist wire. Flowers stay upright and in place when they are placed in-between the bars.

[Floral foam](#) sticks can be stuffed into vases and used to support flower stems and hold arrangements in place. (Scraps from larger pieces of foam can be utilized the same way.) Choose an opaque vase when using foam sticks.

Anchor pins (plastic foam prongs or [frogs](#)) are used to secure floral foam to the bottom of the vase. Affix the pin with hot glue, waterproof clay, or double faced mounting tape. Secure the foam by pressing the dry or saturated floral foam onto the pins. Secure a candle to your arrangement by gluing two anchor pins together, base to base. Insert one set of prongs into the foam and the other set of prongs into the candle.

Foam anchor. A foam anchor has a heavy metal base with long widely spaced pins and is similar in function to anchor pins. Secure it to the bottom of the vase with waterproof clay or hot glue. If you plan to combine fresh and silk flowers, press a piece of foam onto the pins. This provides a place to insert the silk flowers.

A well pinholder can be made by placing a pin [frog](#) in a small container. Use it in small vases for miniature or minimal arrangements.

[Candle cups](#) are used for holding taper candles in floral foam when making centerpieces. Use floral clay at the bottom of your candle when placing in the candle cup to assure it stands straight.