

## Flower Arranging by Gladys Fowler

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Do you love bouquets of fresh flowers in your house but hate cutting flowers from your garden because they are so short lived? Many elements combine to produce a successful flower creation; properly conditioned flowers and foliage, their colours, shapes and textures, and the container in which they are arranged.

Flowers and foliage that are properly conditioned will add days more life to your cut flower arrangements. Flowers should be cut early in the day or late afternoon when the sun is not as hot. When buying flowers or choosing them from the garden, pick those with healthy leaves, and flowers that are in bud and just beginning to open. If flowers are too tightly budded they may never open, if they are too open they will die quickly. Flowers should be placed in a pail with 2-3 inches of hot water. Once you have collected all of your plant material, add cool water to the pail and leave in a cool place for several hours. Remove all leaves on the lower part of the stem that will be submerged in water. Rotting leaves significantly reduces the life of your arrangement. Cut flowers on a slant so that as much water as possible can be taken up by the flowers. Many attractive arrangements use foliage as well as flowers, or foliage on its own. Since leaves absorb water through their surface tissue, leaves should be immersed in water overnight for mature foliage. Young foliage requires only a couple of hours of soaking time. Woody stemmed plants like lilacs, mock orange and pussy willows take up water with difficulty. To aid this process, cut the end of the stem at a sharp angle and hammer about one inch of the stem end and scrape the stem a little above the crushed section. This sounds brutal but will increase the surface area for water uptake. Milky sapped stems like poppies, and spurge need to be heat sealed before arranging them in water. Cut straight across the bottom stems and hold the bottom inch of stem in a flame until it begins to burn. Now they are ready to arrange in water.



Flowers with hollow stems like lupine, delphinium, and calla lily have large, hollow stems, which can be filled with water and plugged with cotton so they last longer. The weak stems of tulips can be improved on by removing some of the leaves, cutting the stems at an angle with a sharp knife. Then make a vertical slit in the stem to increase the area capable of taking up water. If the tulips have been out of water for a while and are wilting, prick the stem of each tulip just below the flower head with a fine sterilized needle. This will release trapped air in the stem. Wrap the tulips in waxed florists tissue or brown paper or newspaper. Then stand them in cold water for two hours, and add flower food to the water. Unwrap the tulips and you'll find the stems are straighter and stronger.

Great arrangements start with a good selection of containers and you likely have more than you think. Flea markets, garage sales and craft stores are great places to pick up containers at reasonable prices. The most versatile containers are tall, and chunky. (pitchers, mugs, buckets) They can be used with floral foam (oasis) or a frog (spiked holder made of plastic, glass etc.) to hold the flowers in place. These types of containers will hold long and short stemmed flowers. They suit flowers like daisies, peonies, dahlias, roses, iris, yarrow and baby's breath to name a few. A bud vase that has a narrow neck, can be short or tall. Perfume bottles, soda or wine bottles, as well as other found objects make great bud vases. Any flower that has a long stem is perfect for a bud vase. Use one or several blooms, but an odd number of blooms always look best. Tea roses, liatris, daffodils, coral bells, mums, and allium look wonderful in bud vases. Short, squat containers look great on a dining room table and allow diners to see each other and converse without having to peer over or around or through the arrangement. These low slung containers are great for flowers with a drooping or trailing habit.

Cut floral foam with a knife to fit the container easily but so that it sticks out an inch or more above the lip of the container. Soak the foam in water for five minutes. Flowers with shorter stems are ideal for this type of container, like nasturtiums, bleeding heart, dianthus, pansies, and shrub roses. The classic vase shape is the hourglass - wider at the top and bottom and narrow in the middle. These vases have the advantage of rarely needing any additional device to hold the flowers in place. Delphinium, obedient plant, garden phlox, monkshood, lilies, lilacs, snapdragons and irises all work well in this type of vase. Any cylindrical or straight-sided container lends itself to plants that have a strong architectural form, like cattails, forsythia, pussywillows, apple or cherry blossoms, azaleas, rhododendrons or any tall plumes from grasses.

A general rule of thumb is that the flowers in an arrangement should be twice as tall as the container. Re-cut flower and foliage stems as you build your arrangement. A lazy susan or turntable is perfect for setting your container on, as you build your masterpiece. Choosing the appropriate container, and conditioning your flowers will go a long way to ensuring a great arrangement. Now you are ready to experiment!