



Cut Flowers

Do you know that using a few simple techniques can extend the beauty of that lovely bouquet of fresh flowers you just purchased? Are you interested in growing flowers for cutting, but aren't really sure what to raise or when to harvest?

Purchasing Cut Flowers

Cut flowers, like other living and growing things, go through a sequence of development. They start as unopened buds, expand to fully-open flowers and then begin to decline. Although a large, fully-open bloom has instant appeal, flowers that are just beginning to open or to show color can be enjoyed for a much longer period of time.

Avoid flowers that are wilted, misshapen, brownish-colored, or blemished due to environmental stress, insects, or disease. Most perennial flowers should not be fully open, but should be just starting to open and show color. Most annuals, on the other hand, should be fully open. As a general rule, flowers that occur in clusters should have at least one flower that is fully open. Roses should have buds that are slightly open and firm with petals free from damage.

Cut Flower Care At Home

Keep in mind that cut flowers are still living plants even though they have been severed from their roots. Employing a few simple techniques you will maximize their vase-life. Key factors to remember include: changing the water frequently, each time recutting the stems and using warm water mixed with a flower food (floral preservative) and keeping your flowers in a cool room out of direct sunlight. For guaranteed success follow these simple steps:

1. Remove any foliage from the lower half of the stem that will be below water level. Using a sharp knife, recut the stems on an angle, removing about half an inch of stem. Then immediately put the flowers in a container with warm water (100 degrees F) and a floral preservative. Using warm water rather than cold will greatly increase water uptake. Dissolving a commercial floral preservative in the water, will not only help flowers to last longer, but will also help to check the growth of rot organisms.

As an alternative to commercial floral preservatives, make your own by dissolving 4 heaping teaspoons of cane sugar and 2 tablespoons of white distilled vinegar in one quart of warm water. Another sample mix that really does work for many types of flowers is to use the soft drink *Sprite* diluted with an equal part of water.

2. Be sure that the vase or container to be used is thoroughly clean. If using florist's foam, thoroughly saturate it by submerging it in water for several minutes.

3. Place the flowers in a cool room away from drafts, direct sunlight and sources of heat. Change the water frequently, even daily, each time recutting the stems and adding floral preservative to the water. Remove any fading blooms or decaying foliage and avoid exposing your cut flowers to ripening fruits or vegetables. These materials produce ethylene gas which will greatly shorten vase life.

Growing Your Own Cut Flowers

Many types of flowering plants and shrubs are not only attractive in a flower border, but also make good cut flowers (see the lists below). A few types do not hold up well in florist's foam and are so indicated in the plant lists.

Although they typically do not last as long as regular cut flowers, many common shrubs, such as lilac and forsythia, can be a source of cut flowers. When using shrubs as cut flowers, crush the ends of the stems, as well as cutting them, to enhance water uptake.

Avoid harvesting your flowers during the heat of the day; evening is fine, but early morning is best. Be sure to take along a bucket of water to put them in as you cut. Avoid crowding flowers in containers, since this will encourage ethylene gas to build up which will shorten vase life. Again, select flowers for cutting for the same reasons as purchasing (see above, Purchasing Cut Flowers).

After harvesting, consider conditioning your cut flowers by holding them in a cool location for 2-12 hours in a container of warm water with added floral preservative.

Using extra greens in your floral arrangements adds interest as well as lending mass to sparsely foliated flowers. Plants that are useful as floral greens are also listed below.

Remember, whether you buy cut flowers or grow your own, they do have a limited life, but by careful handling - recutting the stems frequently, putting them in fresh warm water with a floral preservative, and by placing the flowers in a cool room - you can maximize both their beauty and your enjoyment.

Annuals For Cut Flowers

Ageratum, asters, calendula, celosia, cleome, cosmos, dahlia, dianthus, gladiolus, gomphrena, gypsophila, larkspur, marigold, matricaria, salvia, snapdragon, stocks, zinnia

Perennials For Cut Flowers

*Astilbe, beebalm, canterbury bells, chrysanthemum, coneflower, coreopsis, *daffodil, delphinium, foxglove, gaillardia, golden marguerite, golden thistle, iris, liatris, lily, lily-of-the-valley, *lupine, lobelia, monkshood, painted daisy, peony, *phlox, pinks, platycodon, rose, sedum, shasta daisy, sweet pea vine, sweet william, yarrow*
*** not suited for use in florist's foam**

Woody Ornamentals For Cut Flowers

Azalea, buddleia, forsythia, heather, hydrangea, kousa dogwood, lilac, rhododendron, summersweet, viburnum, witchhazel

Plants For Foliage

Arbovitae, andromeda, euonymus, ferns (various), fir, heather, holly (evergreen), iris, juniper, mountain laurel, peony, pine, scotch broom, spruce

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