

## Proper Flower Cutting and Conditioning Techniques - Becky Hassebroek

- Flowers in the garden should be picked early or late in the day during hot sunny weather.
- Blossoms just coming out of the bud stage will last longer than full ones – avoid buds that are too tight – they may never fully open.
- For lilies, snap off the pollen-bearing stamens before bringing them indoors for an arrangement – they can stain clothing, tablecloths, carpets and upholstery. If entering in the horticulture division of a show, leave the stamens on.
- Do not tug and pull flowers off the plants, but cut them with a sharp pair of clean clippers so that their stems are not crushed. Crushing the stems damages the cells and inhibits the plant from taking up the maximum amount of water. The cut should be made diagonally instead of straight across in order to insure the rise of water through the stem.
- When cutting flowers, follow the five second flower rule - you have five seconds before you need to return the flower stem to water.
- You should carry a pail or vase of hot water with you and, after picking the flowers and placing them in the water, put them in a cool dark room or refrigerator for a few hours before you make your arrangement or ready them for show - this helps them take up the most amount of water so that the cut flowers will last the longest. This is called "conditioning". Foliage or greenery works well after having been completely submerged overnight in the bathtub, filled with water to cover.
- The hot water should contain flower food – you can purchase commercially in bottles or obtain packets from a florist, or you can make your own by mixing three heaping teaspoons of sugar and two tablespoons of white distilled vinegar to each quart of water.
- Once conditioned, re-snip each stem at a 45 degree angle before placing it into the jar or into an arrangement. On stems that are thick or woody, make a 1 to 2 inch slit with scissors or a sharp knife from the base of the stem upward. You can even hammer woody stems with a hammer at the base. This will help the stem to take in enough water and supply moisture to the blooms.
- Garden flowers with hollow stems (or stems that secrete a milky substance when cut) should be seared with a flame after cutting. A candle will work nicely for this.
- Always use clean containers/buckets, and clean tools. A little bleach will sterilize your equipment after using to retard the growth of bacteria.
- Avoid placing cut flowers in direct sunlight, or drafts from heater/AC.
- Be sure to strip off all the leaves from the lower parts of stems that are going to be under water, or into the foam, in the final arrangement, since submerged leaves will decay and have a foul odor. This will help to prolong the life of the plant materials.
- When entering your cut flowers in the horticulture division of a show, be sure to use the container required by the schedule – usually a clear glass container so it has weight and won't fall over and so the judges can see the stems. It is the flower or flowers being judged, not the container, so don't use one that is too showy so that it detracts from the flower – the simpler the better!
- Be sure to include the required number of specimens and place them so as to highlight each other, not intrude on each other.
- Be sure to use a glass container that is the appropriate size for your specimen.
- Wedging is acceptable when the blossom is too heavy, such as a delphinium or dahlia or sunflower.
- Greenery can be left on the stem of a flower that is being shown, but greenery cannot be added if it is not connected to the stem.

- Be sure and fine-tune your exhibit. There should not be any bugs on it. You cannot use leaf shine. It should be clean and with the minimum of flaws. It should be as nearly perfect as possible – mature but not on the way out.
- Be sure and include both the latin and common name on the entry card.

## **Flower Arranging - Becky Hassebroek**

A bouquet is a bunch of flowers presented to someone or placed in a vase as picked. An arrangement is made by putting these flowers and other elements in a particular pleasing display.

In a flower show, the schedule includes specific criteria for each design – what kind of design it is to be and what story it is to tell. You, the designer, then interprets that information into your design. The best interpretation, so long as it is a proper design, wins the top ribbon.

Containers – just anything. Decide on shape of the arrangement. If a Centerpiece, not too high. If on a Mantle, looking up. If on a low coffee table, looking down. So choose the shape and arrangement that will show flowers at their best angle. Consider the size of opening, whether container is waterproof or needs a liner, degree of formality, size so it fits properly in the space. Some possibilities: coffee mugs, watering cans, garden hats, tea cups, sugar bowls, tin cans, baskets, paper bags, salad bowls, gourds, ice buckets, stemware, bottles, boxes, fruit and vegetables (hollowed out).

In a bouquet, you bunch the flowers together and basically use the vase opening to control them. For a design, you can either use Oasis (wet foam) or a needlepoint (also called Kensan or Frog).

Oasis – cut to fit your container and soak in water until wet all the way through. Let it sink under its own weight. Don't force by pushing the block down. Place the block with the tiny holes down in the water. Oasis will float to the top of the container unless this is done. Tape it to the container. Store soaked foam that is unused in a plastic bag in the refrigerator – will keep indefinitely if stays wet. Do Not Re-Use soaked floral foam, as bacteria may have formed. Soak in flower food solution instead of plain tap water so that flowers receive the proper concentration of nutrients. Make sure flower stems are long enough to reach the water reservoir inside the container. Don't insert floral stems into holes in the foam more than once. Leave a reservoir between the edge of the foam block and the container to allow space for watering.

Needlepoint (Kensan, Frog) – best for shallow containers and for preserving the flowers the longest. Use clay to connect to container – can place in multiple areas. Make sure to keep them full of water.

Try not to use clear glass containers, but if you do you can use pebbles, stones or glass nuggets to stabilize the plant materials. Vegetable dye can be added to the water for an interesting effect.

Work at comfortable level. The finished product should be about 1 ½ times the height of the container.

Your largest flowers always go at the lowest point of your arrangement to create stability, with the smaller ones up higher, and you should always have an odd number of flowers in your arrangement, such as three (3) instead of four (4), with equal spacing in between these flowers. The top flower should be the lightest and smallest, perhaps even a bud. Fill in with all colors and sizes to make a pleasing effect, fill in with needed greens, being sure to cover your mechanics. When happy, STOP! Less can be better.

After your design is finished, make sure it doesn't dry out. Top off containers with water periodically. Water is very important to keep your arrangement looking good.

Links to 3 more: <http://www.thegardenclubofbrookfieldct.org/CONDITIONINGFLOWERS.html>  
<http://www.thegardenclubofbrookfieldct.org/CONDITIONINGFLOWERS2.html>  
<http://www.thegardenclubofbrookfieldct.org/CONDITIONINGFLOWERS3.html>