



FLOWERS FOR BOUQUETS

Planning for Bouquets:

The best way to plan your garden for bouquets is to dedicate a specific garden area to these cutting flowers. This way you can cut all that is in flower on any particular day without feeling that you might spoil your landscape display. If space limits this possibility, plan to intermingle your flowers for cutting with the rest of the garden. Be sure to start with well-amended soil, adding lots of organic material. Your plants depend on good, well-drained soil to perform and bloom well.

To maximize the number of flowers on each plant, keep blooming flowers well picked and remove spent flower heads. This will keep seed pods from forming, a process that signals the plant to stop producing more flower buds as its vegetative purpose in flowering is finished. Keep all your flowers well watered throughout the season, supplementing what nature supplies. A side dressing of well-balanced fertilizer several months after planting and during heavy harvesting helps keep new flowers coming with good size and form.

Cutting Flowers in the Garden:

The best time to cut flowers is in the early morning. This is because blossoms have recovered overnight from the stresses of the day's growth and stems are tight with water taken up during cooler moist nighttime conditions. Morning is also the best time to tell which blossoms are brand new and best to harvest. A newly opened flower is always better to pick because it has not been worked and pollinated by the bees. Pollinated flowers immediately begin the process of fading and forming seed and their petals also tend to be more stained after the bees or other pollinators have visited them. Unpollinated fresh new blossoms will have a longer vase life. If your schedule does not permit morning flower harvesting, cut them in the cool of the evening as a second choice. Avoid cutting flowers in the heat of the day.

To harvest flowers for bouquets, carry a small bucket filled with lukewarm water (not cold) out with you into the garden. Place stems of cut flowers directly into the bucket as soon as they are cut. Try to keep the bucket of flowers out of the sun as you pick. Cut stems with a sharp scissors or knife, and never yank their stems or break them off with your fingers if you expect them to last in a bouquet. A cleanly cut flower stem (cut either straight or at an angle) allows plant cells in the stems to continue to circulate and take up water. Remember, cut flowers are alive and need careful treatment so they will last in your bouquets. Cut stems several inches longer than you think you will need, so they can be recut as necessary.

There are a few flowers, notably Poppies, whose stems contain a milky sap that will clog other flowers. Prevent this by quickly singeing them over a flame before placing in water. After bringing the bucket of flowers in from the garden, condition them by letting them rest in the water. They will last much longer than if picked just before making your bouquet. This conditioning process is especially important if you plan to display flowers using floral foam.

H O R T I C U L T U R E F A C T S S H E E T



Preparing Your Flowers for Display:

For long lasting and fresh-looking flowers, plan to use only clean containers, well scrubbed to remove any leftover bacterial growth from the last bouquet. Always strip any foliage that will be below the water line in the vase as otherwise it will decay and foul the water. Most flowers will last longer if their stems are recut under lukewarm water and then immediately transferred to a lukewarm water-filled vase. Even partially wilted flowers can be revived by this technique. Plan to snip off an inch or so, always with a sharp scissors or knife.

Vase life of all flowers is extended by beginning with comfortably warm water (never hot-tend toward lukewarm). Vase life will also be dramatically affected by water type. Do not use artificially softened water that contains dissolved salts; also avoid hard water whose high mineral content may produce unopened buds and darkened droopy petals. If your water is very hard, use distilled or bottled water for bouquets.

Using various preserving additives can significantly prolong flower life. Each method has its proponents, and since water composition differs so much throughout the country; experiment to see what works best. Suggestions range from adding a few drops of bleach to each pint of vase water to keep bacteria from growing to using a solution made with lemon-lime soda, one part soda to two parts water. The sugar in the soda is said help buds continue to open, and acidity inhibits bacterial growth. Excellent results can be had using the powdered preservative sold at most florists and nurseries.

Whatever kind of water or solution you use, nothing will substitute for using only the freshly opened flowers, sharp cutting tools, and sparkling clean containers. When you have put your bouquets on display, change the water frequently to prolong their life. Recutting flower stems a small amount every few days will also help them to last longer. Finally, keep finished bouquets out of drafts and direct sunlight.

Enjoy your floral bounty by making up bouquets of all sizes. It is a source of great satisfaction and pleasure and you will discover your own artistic style as you play with different shapes and color combinations. Bouquets of flowers grace the home and gladden the heart, and they are joyful gifts to give yourself and others.