

How to Condition Your Cut Flowers for Showing at Fair

Are you one of those people whose flowers look great in the garden, but wilt away when brought inside? There are things you can do to prolong the life of flowers once cut. What follows are some general guidelines, so remember there are exceptions to almost everything, but be assured that you CAN make your cut flowers last longer.

If you are buying flowers from a shop, the florist should have conditioned them for you. But whenever you pick flowers from your garden or buy a growers' bunch at a farm stand, follow these simple steps to keep them in good shape for a week or longer.

The time of day you cut the flowers is important. Early morning (the day before showing at the fair) before the dew has dried is best because the plant is full of water and the tissues are strong. Evening (the night before showing at the fair) is also good because the plant has been manufacturing food all day and has a good supply to feed it once cut.

Select blooms that are nearly fully open (except asters, marigolds, zinnias, and mums which should be fully open). Use a sharp cutting utensil (a sharp knife, scissors or garden shears, and pruners) so you don't crush the stems and hinder their water carrying ability. Take a tall container of lukewarm water to the garden with you and immediately place the flowers loosely in it and **remove only foliage that will be under water**. Some plants prefer cold water: dahlias, daffodils, hydrangeas, and poppies can be placed in cold water immediately after cutting.

Cut more stem than you will actually use in the vase and cut all green and woody stems at a 45-degree angle. This prevents stems from sitting flat in the vase and creates a large surface area, ensuring maximum water absorption. Use clippers or shears for woody stems and sharp scissors or knives for other flowers. If possible, cut stems under water. For all flowers, remove any leaves that would otherwise sit under the waterline in the vase; leaves rot when submerged, encouraging algae and bacteria in the container and shortening the life of the blooms.

To condition the flowers, leave in the water in a cool dark place for several hours or overnight. Be careful if placing flowers in the refrigerator as temperatures and locations within the refrigerator may cause freezing and severely damage your flowers. Some plants have extra special requirements, such as:

- plants with hollow stems, like roses, benefit from being cut underwater to prevent a bubble of air from forming and blocking water
- some hollow-stemmed plants that leak milky sap should be sealed to prevent the sap from leaking out. Seal by dipping the stem ends in boiling water for 20 seconds or holding the ends over a candle flame. Flowers that benefit from this are: daffodils, hardy mums, hydrangeas, poppies, lobelia, stephanotis, heliotrope
- Woody stemmed plants should be **SPLIT**, not crushed, at the end

Use clean containers and CHANGE THE WATER DAILY for your arranged flowers. Bacteria will spoil your bouquets very quickly. For this reason, be sure to removed any foliage below water level and remove spent flowers to allow the rest to last longer.

For cut flowers to survive, they need sugar for nourishment and an acidic ingredient, such as aspirin, to help them absorb water. Cut-flower food provides all the nutrition stems need, but you can also use this formula: For every quart of water, add two aspirins, a teaspoon of sugar, and a few drops of bleach (to reduce bacteria). Check water level frequently to make sure stem ends are covered; change the water and re-cut stems every five days.

Remember to complete the [Flower Project Report Form](#) and bring with your exhibit to the fair for judging