

Treatment of Cut Flowers and a Selection of Additives / Feeds

These are some simple techniques you can use to extend the life of your cut flowers from days, to over a week.

- 1) In the morning or early evening, harvest the flowers when the buds are just starting to open.
- 2) Cut each stem to the desired length. Use sharp secateurs to cut the stem at a slant, increasing the area for water uptake.
- 3) Immediately put the stem in a bucket of tepid water to prevent the cut end from sealing. If the cut end should seal, the flower would not be able to take up water.
- 4) Once indoors, strip off any foliage on the stems that would be underwater in your display vase, to prevent rotting leaves in the water.
- 5) Transfer to a vase with lukewarm water to a depth of halfway up the stems – no further.
- 6) Flowers with hollow stems such as lupins, delphiniums and hollyhocks tend to dry out quickly, after which they will not take up water at all. To prevent this, invert the stems, fill with water, and plug with cottonwool or soft tissue. Hold the plug in position while placing each flower in the water.
- 7) The best-proven additive is the commercially prepared powder available from your local florist. Favourite old-fashioned water additives to preserve fresh cut flowers include: **1/2 cup lemon-lime soda (non-diet) or 1 tsp. sugar to provide food, and 1/4 tsp of bleach or vodka to inhibit bacteria.**
- 8) Be sure to change water completely every 2/3 days. This is more important than any additive you could use!
- 9) Finally ... keep the vase **out** of direct sunlight and away from fruit (which releases ethylene gas, which encourages wilting.) Though these steps may seem like fussy tasks, the reward of longer-lasting cut flowers fresh from your garden will be well worth the effort!

Commercial feed from the florist: Ask for a few packets of feed when buying flowers from a florist. Each water change add a new packet. Also In addition to the food, adding a tiny amount of bleach to the water — 1/4 tsp. per litre of water — will also help keep the water clean and clear and prevent harmful microorganisms from taking over.

Aspirin: Put a crushed aspirin in the water before adding your flowers. Also, don't forget to change the vase water every 3 days and add a further Aspirin.

Other suggestions include: Neat fizzy drink '7 Up', two or three copper coins in the bottom of the vase

General tips and advice

1. Cut off the white portion at the bottom of bulb flowers like tulips, daffodils, jonquils, narcissus, irises and hyacinths. Only the green part of the stem can take up water. Daffodils, jonquils and narcissus have a thick sap which oozes from the end of the stems when they are cut. Wipe it off before placing the stems in water. Keep these flowers separate from other flowers when they are being conditioned as the sap can affect other flowers. The thick sap can clog the ends of stems and prevent the uptake of water. Stand the stems in about 7.5 cm. (3") of water and allow to stand at least six hours before arranging. Bulb flowers prefer shallow water. If daffodils, jonquils and narcissus are placed in deep water, the thick stems can become water logged and the stems shrivel up and the petals go papery.
2. A crushed multivitamin tablet works well.
3. Wilted flowers can often be revived by standing the stems in fairly hot water right up to the flower heads. After the water has cooled, allow the flowers to stand in the water for a few hours before arranging. Roses can often be perked up by floating the whole stem, head and all, in warm water for half an hour.
4. Place bought flowers in warm water as soon as possible. Remove the wrapping paper, as paper can bruise the flowers and cellophane can cause them to sweat. When cut flowers have been left out of water for any length of time, cells start to form over the cut ends of the stems, which will prevent the stems taking up water readily. To remove this sealed portion, snip off about 2.5cm (1") from the stem ends and then place in water preferably with preservative added, and allow the flowers to have a long drink before arranging.
5. Give special treatment to certain flowers to give them the longest life possible. Flowers with woody stems do not take up water readily. Woody-stemmed flowers include lilac, hydrangea, and rhododendrons. To help break down the thick fibres, you can split the ends of the stems upwards for about 5 cm. (2") After this treatment, place the stems in a container filled with warm water and give the flowers a long drink before arranging.
6. If you are picking your own flowers, it is best to do this in the morning or the late evening. Sugar reserves in the stems are at their highest in the mornings or evenings. Ideally the best time is early morning when flower stems are filled with water after the cool night air. You should never pick flowers in the middle of the day when the sun is at its hottest. The heat of the sun lowers the water content in the stems and the flowers will not last nearly as long. If it has been raining and the flowers are wet, shake them gently to remove the excess water. Too much water will often damage flowers – especially delicately petalled flowers.
7. Most flowers should be picked when they are in bud or half open. You will then have the pleasure of seeing them slowly open up. The colour of the petals should be starting to show. If picked too tightly in bud, they may never open. This is especially true of tulips and roses. The green pointed sepals around the base of the rose should be starting to turn downwards. Irises and daffodils should be half opened. Gladioli should be picked when the bottom three or four florets are open and the top florets are still in bud. Carnations, dahlias, marigolds, hydrangeas, camellias, gerberas and chrysanthemums should be picked when they are fully opened.

8. Try adding a teaspoon of sugar or a pinch of salt mixed with baking soda.
9. Keep them cool and put aspirin in them. Crush the aspirin in the water before adding the flowers.
10. If you are unable to place flowers in water, place them in a strong plastic bag with some water in the bottom. Secure the bag with a rubber band. Another method is to wrap flowers in damp newspaper. If travelling by car, place the flowers in the coolest spot. As soon as you get home, re-cut the ends of the stems, place them in water and allow them to condition overnight before arranging.