Conditioning Cut Flowers

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Proper preparation and careful maintenance maximizes vase life of any cut flower whether home grown or purchased. Proper conditioning or hardening of flowers is critical. Recut stems under water to prevent air bubbles from forming within the stems. Remove 2 inches from the bottom of each stem, cutting at an angle. Transfer the cut flowers into the container in which they will be conditioned. To condition, immediately immerse flowers in tepid water (110 F) containing floral preservative almost up to the flower heads. Fuzzy foliaged plants such as dusty miller shouldn't have their foliage submerged during conditioning. Remove lower 1/3 of the foliage and immerse only to foliage level. Place the containers of flowers in a cool, dark, humid location for a minimum of 2 hours-Longer preferred. After this time, flowers are ready to be arranged. When transferring to the vase, recut stems underwater to the lengths needed for the arrangement.

Some flowers require special attention prior to conditioning. **Flowers with milky sap** such as *oriental poppies* seal over, preventing water uptake. To prevent this sealing, singe the ends of the stems in an open flame until they blacken or immerse the lower stem in boiling water for 20 to 30 seconds. **Flowers with woody stems** should have the bark scraped away from the lower portion of the stem, then be cross-cut to increase water uptake. **Flowers with hollow stems** such as *hollyhocks and delphiniums* should have their stems filled with water. Turn stems upside down and pour water into the stems until full and plug the ends with cotton or absorbent floral foam. To eliminate small air bubbles, pierce the stem with a pin just below the flower head.

If flowers stems are recut, these special procedures will need to be repeated.! Floral preservatives supply sugars needed for survival & growth as well as disinfectants to inhibit the growth of bacteria & fungi in the water. A good floral preservative uses ¼ tsp of citric acid per gallon of water. Citric acid is commonly available at drugstores. **OR** One tablespoon of sugar and1/4 teaspoon of bleach is another widely used preservative. The bleach kills bacteria and fungi while the sugar nourishes the flower. Tonic water or lemon-lime soda (not diet) at the rate of 2 parts water: one part soda or tonic water works as a preservative as well. Many florists also sell several ready-made additives which disinfect the water and provide the needed sugars.

Additional hints to maximize vase life: 1. keeping the vase filled with water. Check frequently. 2. avoid the use of chemically softened water. 3.Start with clean vases and clean flower stems. 4.Keep out of sunlight, away from heat and drafts/cool location to minimize water loss. 5. Change vase water periodically if possible. If not- use of floral preservatives. **If water is changed, recut the stems**. 6. Flower selection is the most critical step. Choose flowers that are just coming into bloom before pollen is loose. When choosing flowers at the florist, avoid soft, limp blossoms and buds and discolored or drooping foliage. When purchasing flowers, select those with a long vase life and buy from a quality florist.

This article originally appeared in the August 11, 1993 issue, pp. 1, 1993 issue, pp. 133-134.