

TIPS FOR DISPLAYING CUT FLOWERS.... *at home or at the fair*

1. Remove the foliage from the portion of the stems that will be in water. Foliage covered with water will rot, discolor the water, and the bacteria growing in the water will block the stems causing the flowers to wilt sooner.

2. Labeling

While bouquets at home don't need labels, exhibits for the fair do. List the cultivar name as well as the type of flower (or vegetable) on the entry tag. Keeping records of what you plant and where will help you to know what each cultivar is when you prepare your exhibits. Exhibits without the cultivar or variety name are usually lowered one ribbon placing. Proper labeling insures that the judge can base the placing on the proper criteria.

Good records also help you as you determine whether or not a specific cultivar is worth growing again. Finally, fair visitors and other exhibitors may be interested in growing the cultivars of plants that you grew and can get the information from the label.

3. Conditioning Flowers

Conditioning flowers helps them last longer by reducing stem blockage and promoting quick water uptake. **The vase life of many flowers, especially roses, can be increased by re-cutting the stems while holding them under water.** This method prevents air from getting into the stem and blocking water uptake. Since you'll need to re-cut the stems, always cut them as long as possible when harvesting your flowers. Cut the ends diagonally so they won't rest flat on the bottom of the container. They'll be able to absorb water more efficiently.

Carry a bucket of lukewarm water with you as you harvest your flowers. After cutting, place them in a cool location so they can take up as much water as they can hold. Most flowers should be placed in a refrigerator set at 35 to 40°F for 3 to 12 hours. If you don't have room in the refrigerator or it contains fruits and vegetables, place the flowers in a cellar or basement or other cool area. Re-cut the stems just before exhibiting so stems are sure to be open for water uptake.

4. Use a floral preservative - Either commercial or homemade.

A floral preservative should reduce bacterial growth and provide food for the cut flower. You can purchase packets of floral preservative from local florists and mix according to directions on the product. Here are two recipes for homemade floral preservatives.

Homemade Floral Preservatives

Recipe #1

2 c. lemon-lime soft drink (not diet) such as 7-up or Sprite
½ t. Liquid chlorine laundry bleach
2 c. water

Recipe #2

2 T. white vinegar
2 t. sugar
½ t. chlorine bleach
1 qt. water

Use either of these recipes in place of plain water. The acidity of the lemon-lime soda or vinegar lowers the pH of the water so bacteria don't grow well; the chlorine bleach kills bacteria on the stems and the sugar provides food for the flower.

5. Containers

While the container is not usually judged in cut flower divisions, it should still be a good size and shape for the flowers displayed. The opening should be large enough that the stems don't have to be forced into the neck, yet small enough that the blooms don't fall in and become waterlogged.

6. Grooming

Remove all insects, soil and spray residue from the foliage, stems and blossoms, but be careful not to bruise the foliage or petals. Smooth the petals, remove faded blooms, petals and ragged leaves. Grooming should not be evident, so if you have to remove too much bad material, it is better to try and find another specimen.

7. Transporting

Most mechanical damage occurs in transit! Pack containers carefully and if possible, wrap individual blooms in tissue paper. Also, pack a few extra flowers (vegetables and/or cookies!) in case one gets damaged. If sending flowers or vegetables to State Fair with your Extension Educator, be sure to let them know if you packed extra so they can be discarded when not needed.

8. Correct number of specimens

Double check the required number of specimens in your fair book! Count and re-count!

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