

Keep 'em Fresh

*"Arranging a bowl of flowers in the morning can give a sense of quiet in a crowded day—
like writing a poem or saying a prayer."*

Anne Morrow Lindbergh



What a delightful image. Whether you cut flowers to give as gifts to others or for your own enjoyment, you want to keep them looking good for as long as possible. Here are some simple things you can do to prolong the life of cut flowers:

When a flower is cut from a plant, it is separated from its life support system. Just like an astronaut without a temporary life support system -- it's in trouble. You need to provide the basic components of the life support system for the cut flower so that it can continue to grow – water, a biocide, an acidifier, and

sugar. The water keeps the circulation system of the flower going. Biocides are chemicals that kill the bacteria, yeasts and fungi that feed on the sap that seeps from the cut flower stem. The acid helps water move up the stem more easily and the sugar acts as a flower food.

When you cut a bloom from a plant, immerse the stem in a bucket of warm water right away. The flower stem is filled with cells that work like a bundle of soda straws. As long as the bottom of the straws are submerged, you can draw water up through them. These cells have tiny screens that allow water to pass, but not air. When the flower stem is cut, a small air bubble can form at the end of the stem; this trapped air acts like a barrier and prevents more water from getting up the stem. Make your cuts on a slant to expose more stem surface area.

The best time to cut blossoms is early in the morning when the sugar (glucose) content is the highest or late in the afternoon when the temperatures have cooled. Use a sharp knife or shears, not a scissors, which might crush the stems and cause damage to the tiny tubes that carry water.

Whatever container you choose to use for your flowers, be sure they're clean and sanitized. Scrub well with a bottle brush to eliminate any built up residue, then soak it in a solution of household bleach for a few minutes (about one cup per gallon of water). Alternatively, you can run the container through your dishwasher.

Commercial preservative solutions are widely available that include the biocide, acid and sugar combo; or you can simply make own. Mix 1 teaspoon of sugar, 1 teaspoon of plain household bleach, 2 teaspoons of lemon or lime juice and a quart of lukewarm water.

Keep your cut blooms away from strong sunlight - a cool environment is best. Keep an eye on the water levels in the vase, and change the water frequently. Depending on the your choice of flowers, they may last from 4 – 7 days. What a delight!

By Nanette Londeree

Photo by Carolyn Parker