

Flowers 101 – From Seed to Vase

Beginning Flower Arranging

Flower arranging is something everyone can do. All you really need is a container, water and flowers. We are going to take it a step further and give you some tips to create a simple arrangement. All you really need to get better at arranging are the right tools, beautiful flowers and practice.

To start you will need a vase or vessel to hold your flowers, chicken wire or a frog (attached with floral adhesive clay), waterproof floral tape, flower food, sharp snips and pruners. Highly recommended is a lazy Susan so you are able to easily turn your arrangement as you work.

When choosing a vase or vessel for your arrangement, the height of the flowers is usually 1 to 2 times the height of the vase. Decide where your arrangement will be located to determine if all sides will be seen or just the front will be visible. If it is a table centerpiece, the arrangement needs to be low enough that people can see over it. Choose a color palette and keep it simple when you start: two to three complimentary colors with fillers and greens is quite nice. One general rule is not to combine warm and cool colors.

Put your flower food in the bottom of the vase and fill with cool water. You need 4 tablespoons to one gallon of water. Medium-size vases are about 1/2 a gallon. Be sure the part of your plant stems that fall below the water are stripped of leaves. Recut your flower stems except those that exude milky substances (euphorbia). If you are arranging with “dirty” flowers (Black-eyed Susans, yarrow, kale, chrysanthemums and zinnias), add a few drops of bleach to the water.

Before we start arranging, let’s talk about some fundamentals. A very knowledgeable flower grower, arranger and author classifies flowers into 6 “fundamental ingredient categories.” They are structural foliage, supporting ingredient, textural

ingredient, supporting flowers, focal flowers and airy accents.

As you work with different materials you will want to incorporate many of these categories into your arrangement. As the name implies, structural foliage is the backbone of the arrangement. With large flowers, foliage with larger leaves can be incorporated. Think peonies and laurel. Your focal flowers are, of course, the stars of your arrangement. Add them towards the end so they are placed where easily visible.

Have all your materials ready and near your work area. Be sure you have good light. It’s important to have a standing-height table or countertop so you don’t have to lean over to work. It’s important you have running water nearby. If you are working in your home, you might want to throw a tarp or shower curtain on the floor so cleanup is a snap.

Start by adding your flowers and foliage at the perimeter of the vase and work inward. Add your structural foliage and textural plants and support flowers. Add your star flowers starting at the center and working outward. That way your showiest flowers are in the center area. Slowly work in with filler and airy plants. Keep adding fillers and flowers until you have the look you like. Stand back during the process and just look at the arrangement. Be sure you view it from all sides, and, again, a lazy Susan really helps you see your arrangement easily from all angles. As a beginner it will take a while to achieve the look you want, but with practice it will become easier.

Once you are satisfied with your arrangement, you may want to add a ribbon or a bow to your arrangement. And then you are done! If you are interested there are a number of amazing flower arrangers who have shared their knowledge and love of flowers and arranging. A few are listed in our bibliography.

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Be sure you place your arrangement out of the sun in a cool spot if possible. Check your vase every day to be sure the water level is high enough and change the water as often as possible. If you can, add more flower food to the new water. And if you can recut the stems, that's even better, but that is asking a lot!

Have fun, grow lots of flowers and experiment with plant materials you are surrounded by in your garden.
Happy Gardening!

