



FLORET FARM'S

# Cut Flower Garden

GROW, HARVEST & ARRANGE  
STUNNING SEASONAL BLOOMS

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## CARING FOR CUT FLOWERS

It's a deeply thrilling experience to stroll through the cutting garden, harvesting armloads of fresh flowers that you grew yourself to create a beautiful arrangement. After so many months of hard work and careful tending, the bounty is a priceless reward.

Throughout the book, I share my tried-and-true tricks for getting the longest vase life from each individual variety. In addition to these specific tips, the following are important techniques to help you get the most from your cut flowers.

### CLEAN AND SANITIZE BUCKETS AND VASES BEFORE USE

This is one of the most important things you can do to extend the vase life of your cut flowers. A good rule of thumb is that vessels should be clean enough to drink from. Dirty containers are hosts to bacteria, which will plug up stems and prevent them from taking up water, and will decrease the flowers' vase life significantly.

### HARVEST FLOWERS AND FOLIAGE DURING THE COOLEST HOURS OF THE DAY

Either in the morning or evening is when plants are the most plump and hydrated and will recover most quickly from the shock of being cut.

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## PICK BLOOMS AT THE RIGHT STAGE OF MATURITY FOR THE LONGEST SHOW

Every variety has an ideal time to be cut, which I share in each plant profile. But for the most part, harvesting flowers before they've fully opened, and before the bees have found them, is best. Once pollinated, flowers are signaled to start making seeds, and their vase life is inherently shortened.

## PLACE STEMS INTO COOL, CLEAN WATER

As you harvest, remove leaves from the lower half of the stems, and place immediately into cool, clean water. This will minimize wilting, since there is less foliage to rehydrate. The easiest way to do this is to carry a bucket with you into the garden at harvest time.

## LET THE STEMS REST

Place buckets of freshly picked stems in a cool spot, out of direct sunlight, to rest for a few hours before arranging. This gives the flowers and foliage a chance to fully rehydrate.

## ADD FLORAL PRESERVATIVE

This "flower food" contains three important ingredients: sugar, an acidifier, and a biocide. Mix them with your vase water, and these ingredients will keep your flowers fed, keep the water acidic enough for flowers to continue drinking, and stop harmful bacteria from forming in the vase. My favorite type, Floralife Crystal Clear, can be ordered online. Add 1 teaspoon (5 g) of the powdered preservative to each quart/liter of water and stir well before adding flowers.

## RECUT STEMS

Recut stems at an angle with sharp pruners before placing flowers and foliage in the vase. This will encourage them to continue drinking steadily.

## CUT STEMS: SPECIAL CASES

### DIRTY FLOWERS

A few flower types are lovingly referred to in the trade as "dirty flowers." These varieties are notorious for turning water murky really fast, even with floral preservative added to the water. Black-eyed Susan, sunflowers, yarrow, and zinnias are all members of this club. To combat their messy behavior and extend their vase life, add a few drops of bleach to the water along with the floral preservative.

### WIMPY DRINKERS

A number of flowers and foliage types are amazing in the vase but can sometimes be difficult to get hydrated after picking. For these treasures, dip their stem ends into boiling water, or hold the stem ends over an open flame, for 7 to 10 seconds, at which point you will notice the stems changing color and texture. Then place them in a vase of cool water. This treatment works well for basil, cerinthe, Iceland poppies, mint, and scented geranium, but can also be tried on anything that's prone to wilting. I use the boiling water method for most crops because it's easiest (I can dip an entire handful of flowers at once), but a flame is more effective for Iceland poppies.

### WOODY BRANCHES

Many flowering trees and shrubs make wonderful cutting material, but getting their woody stems to take up water can be tricky. As soon as you harvest these stems, remove the lower half of their leaves and use heavy clippers to split their woody stem ends vertically a few inches up. Then place them directly into a bucket of cool, fresh water to rest until arranging.

## BUCKETS

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## FLORIST'S TOOLBOX

Having the right supplies for flower arranging is the key to being able to get down to business when inspiration strikes. The following are what I keep on hand in my flower studio.

**CHICKEN WIRE** A great alternative to toxic flower foam, a ball of chicken wire inserted into a vase provides a sturdy framework to keep heavier stems upright.

**FABRIC SCISSORS** It's essential to designate a sharp pair of fabric scissors for ribbon only to preserve the blades' sharp edges. Tie a piece of ribbon to the handle as a reminder not to use them for cutting paper or wire.

**FLORAL ADHESIVE CLAY** I use this waterproof adhesive to secure flower frogs to the bottom of vases. It's available in green or white; I prefer the green, because it seems to be more durable and long lasting.

**FLORAL STEM WRAP** Adhering to itself when gently stretched, this tape is great for boutonnieres, corsages, and flower crowns. It's available in an array of colors, but I find the light green the most versatile.

**FLOWER FROGS** Available in pin or cage style, flower frogs can be found at craft stores, but I also scour antique stores and flea markets to find more unique shapes and sizes. Secured with floral adhesive clay to the bottom of a vase, flower frogs allow you to use heavy, woody branches in shallow vessels without fear of their toppling out.

**FLOWER SNIPS** I mentioned these in the gardening tools section; they're also essential when working with bouquets.

**GLOVES** Lightweight nitrile gloves are my daily go-to's because they are durable, breathable, and easy to clean. They're great to have on hand when working with thorny materials like bells of Ireland and roses, and for protecting your hands from the irritating sap of false Queen Anne's lace.

**PADDLE WIRE** Available at most craft stores, this continuous spool of wire is ideal for making wreaths and garlands. You can also cut smaller pieces off the spool to attach little bundles of interesting materials to wreaths and garlands. And it's available in precut pieces (often labeled as floral wire) as well. I prefer the 22-gauge type of both paddle and precut floral wire.

**PAPER-COVERED WIRE** Available in both green and brown, this handy wire makes the perfect base for a flower crown and is what I use to attach garlands to banisters and doorways.

**PRUNERS** A pair of heavy-duty pruners is great to have on hand for larger woody branches and cutting through multiple stems at once. Again, I prefer the ARS brand for their ergonomically designed handles and chrome-plated blades.

**ROSE STRIPPER** This handy little tool makes removing thorns from roses and other prickly stems fast and easy.

**RUBBER BANDS** I always keep a few on hand out in the garden. Number 19 is the perfect size for bunching flowers.

**TWINE** Simple, natural jute works well for tying bouquets and also for making garlands.

**WATER TUBES** These miniature vessels hold enough water to keep a flower fresh for a day or two. Available in varying lengths, these are essential for adding flowers to premade garlands or wreaths.

**WATERPROOF FLORAL TAPE** This sturdy tape is perfect for securing chicken wire in a vase and wrapping bouquets for extra support. The ¼-inch (0.6-cm) size is my favorite.

**WIRE WREATH FRAME** Available in numerous sizes from most craft stores, these frames provide a sturdy base for wreath making.





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