

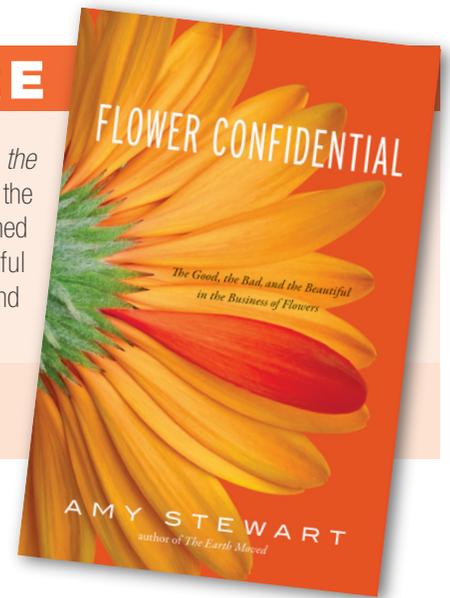


CUT FLOWER CARE

AMY STEWART, author of *Flower Confidential: The Good, the Bad, and the Beautiful in the Business of Flowers*, traveled the world exploring the \$40 billion cut flower industry. She learned the secrets for growing, arranging, and caring for beautiful flowers from Dutch hybridizers, Ecuadorian rose growers, and Manhattan florists.

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BE GOOD TO YOUR FLOWERS

To get the most out of your cut flowers, try these techniques:

- ✿ Buy flowers that have been kept **under refrigeration**. If they've been sitting out on the sidewalk or in buckets in the produce department, they've lost vase life. That doesn't mean they have to be behind glass: some retailers have special air conditioners that keep the air right around the flowers cool.
- ✿ Ask your florist for a **vase life guarantee**. Most florists will replace flowers that don't last at least five or seven days in the vase.
- ✿ **Re-hydrate** roses and other sturdy flowers by plunging the entire flower and stem under cold water. One rose grower says that submerging roses in the bathtub for three hours will add two days' vase life.
- ✿ Before you put flowers in a vase, make sure the vase is clean and fill it with water. Use sharp scissors or a knife to **strip off leaves** that will be underwater, then **re-cut the stems** and place immediately in water.
- ✿ **Commercial flower food** really will extend the vase life of flowers. You can buy it at craft stores, nurseries, and flower shops, or online at www.floralife.com. If you don't have any, use a pinch of sugar and a few drops of bleach. (Believe it or not, a pinch of ground-up Viagra works, too!)
- ✿ Keep the flowers in a **cool spot** out of direct sunlight and away from **heater or air conditioning vents**, which can dry flowers and cause them to wilt. In dry climates, spritzing the flowers with water may extend their life.
- ✿ In summer months, consider **tropical flowers** that naturally grow in warmer climates and last longer at higher temperatures. Examples include orchid, bird of paradise, protea, heliconia, or anthurium.
- ✿ **Change the water**, especially if it gets cloudy, and re-cut the stems every few days.
- ✿ In mixed bouquets, **remove flowers** when they start to wilt; they may give off ethylene, which could cause other flowers to wilt early, too.
- ✿ **Tulips** continue to grow in the vase, and it is natural for the stems to bend and curve. **Lilies** may drop pollen that can stain clothes; carefully remove the pollen-covered stamens and use sticky tape (never water!) to remove pollen from fabric.

DESIGN IT YOURSELF

Here are some simple strategies to design elegant bouquets:

- ✿ Choose a bouquet of just **one type of flower**. A simple bundle of daisies or sunflowers is striking and elegant. (Florists call this a monobotanical arrangement.)
- ✿ Limit your choices to **one color family**. Hot orange, red, and yellow work well together. Dark, dramatic purples and blues also harmonize. Or try pale pastels like pink, lavender, and white.
- ✿ **Group flowers by shape**. Florists pay attention to not just the color, but the shapes of flowers. Use tall vases for spikes like gladiolus, snapdragon, or foxglove. Create a cluster of flat-topped flowers like daisy, cosmos, or yarrow. Put round focal flowers like roses or dahlias together in a tight, lush bouquet.
- ✿ **Take apart a mixed bouquet** and make three or four smaller, more harmonious arrangements. Add flowers, leaves, and other natural elements from your garden.
- ✿ **Showcase smaller flowers** and blossoms with short stems. Use shallow bowls and cups to display groupings of pansies, forget-me-nots, alyssum, or even larger flowers like camellia, roses, or lilies.
- ✿ **Use wire or floral foam** (available at craft stores) to hold stems in place.



BUY THE BEST Meet some of the florists featured in *Flower Confidential*:

Organic Bouquet ships organic and eco-friendly flowers directly to your door. (www.organicbouquet.com or 877-899-2468)

b brooks fine flowers is a network of specialty florists with a lush, elegant style. (www.bbrooks.com or 888-346-3356)

Bonny Doon Garden Company is a shop in Santa Cruz, California that ships old-fashioned posies nationwide. (www.bonnydoongardenco.com or 866-767-4348)

Field of Flowers is a chain of flower superstores in the Miami area with a vast selection and a worktable where you can

design your own arrangements. (www.fieldofflowers.com or 954-680-6888)

Flowers of the World is an upscale shop in Manhattan specializing in exquisite arrangements and unique designs. (www.flowersoftheworld.com or 800-582-0428)