

Maximizing the Life of Your Bouquet

Used as a symbol of love and devotion, many will receive bouquets on or around Valentine's day. While flowers have fallen behind greeting cards and candy as Valentine's gifts, they are still the gold standard in many people's eyes, and hearts.

Although a popular gift, most recipients don't know how best to care for cut flowers. Proper care of cut flowers can take your bouquet from lasting 4-5 days to lasting up to 2 weeks—depending on the type of flowers you have and their age and condition when you receive them.

The first and most important step when you're purchasing flowers (or seeds, bulbs, trees, etc.) is to start with a quality product! This is always the first, critical, step in everything horticulture! Many people hold sacred their relationships with their doctor or handy man, and so too should you hold your relationship with your local florist. Your neighborhood florist may make bouquets for your wedding, for a family member's funeral and for all your special occasions. If you forgot that Valentine's Day was next Thursday, a florist who knows you personally will be much more willing to find something for you to give your sweetheart than someone whom you've never met. This cherished florist will also hold sacred your business and would never sell you brown edged roses or lilies at the end of their bloom. If you don't have this relationship established, look for fresh, tight flowers. Avoid anything brown, with wilting or flowers that appear fully open.

The next step in having a long-lasting bouquet is selecting long lasting flowers. Although roses are the traditional Valentine's flower, don't be afraid to pick out a bouquet with other florals, even if roses are still in the mix. Zinnias, dahlias, chrysanthemums, peonies, orchids and lilies can all be statement flowers that will last much longer than roses. Accent flowers like freesia, alstroemeria and carnations can also all add a longer lasting punch of color. Carnations often carry a bad reputation for being a "cheap" flower but when properly used they can look as elegant as a rose and you get much more for your money. Greenery, like fern and eucalyptus, will almost certainly outlast your flowers and should play a role in the bouquet although they should never take center stage.

If you purchase your bouquet without a vase, get the flowers in water as soon as possible. The drive from the florist to your home should be the maximum amount of time the stems are without water. As soon as you get home, fill a vase with cool, clean water and add a packet of floral food. Floral food should be complementary with any flower purchase and is the best option for cut flowers. Next you'll want to re-trim the stem ends while holding them underwater and then quickly place each stem in the vase.

The water in your vase will play a key role in your bouquet's longevity. Water should always cover all the stem ends and be clear and debris free. If you notice any leaves down in the water, remove them. As your flowers use water you can top it off, until you begin to see discoloration, then it's time to replace. When you replace the water in your vase, it's a good idea to re-trim the stems, but it isn't totally necessary. If you have more floral food, you can add it to the fresh water. If you don't have more floral food, just leave the water plain. Pennies, bleach and sugar have not been shown to prolong the life of cut flowers.

Cut flowers should be kept away from windows, air vents and warmer spaces of your home or office. Cooler areas help flowers last longer but flowers should never be exposed to freezing temperatures. A

little extra care for your bouquet will reward you with many more days of enjoyment. As flowers in your bouquet begin to die, remove only the brown and wilting flowers. After 2 weeks you may still have greenery and a filler flower or two still holding on. Transfer the leftovers to a smaller vase (I always keep bud vases on hand just for this occasion) and enjoy the hardiest parts of your bouquet for much longer!