

Enjoy Flowers from your Garden Longer

By Kathy Ruiz
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The warm weather this spring has certainly helped flower gardens prosper. If you have Roses, Columbine, Peonies, Tulips, Daisies, Phlox, or other flowers in bloom, bring them inside to further enjoy them. Keep them fresh longer by following these few tips.

Cut the flowers early in the morning. Select flowers that are just opening up. If the flowers are past their prime, they won't last as long in the vase. As you cut them place them in a bucket or container of lukewarm water.

Before arranging the flowers, re-cut each stem at angle, under water, then place the flower in a deep bucket filled with warm water. Keep the bucket in a cool location for several hours. This process will allow the flowers to be fully hydrated and should help extend their lives.

Be sure the container for the arrangement is clean. Flower stems from the previous bouquet may have left bacteria and fungi that will encourage decay in the freshly placed flowers. Clean the container with hot, soapy water and scrub out any debris. You may even want to disinfect the vase by soaking it in a solution of 1 part bleach to 10 parts water. Be sure to rinse the container well after using the bleach solution.

To give the flowers a boost and help keep them fresh longer, make a solution that will provide some food for them as well as maintain enough acidity in the water to reduce the growth of bacteria. Mix one part lemon-lime soda (not diet) with three parts of warm water. Add $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of bleach per quart of the solution. Or to one quart of warm water, add two tablespoons of lemon juice, either fresh or bottled, one tablespoon of sugar and $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of bleach.

The solution in the vase will evaporate and the flowers will take it up, so check the level daily and add more as needed. Give the flowers a fresh mix of the solution if the vase starts to smell bad or the water becomes cloudy. Be sure to re-cut the stems of the flowers and rinse them off before placing them back in the vase.

When you are ready to arrange the flowers, remove foliage from the portion of the stems that will be submerged in the vase. Leaving this excess plant material on will only hasten decay and shorten the life of the arrangement. As you place the flowers in their clean container, cut the stems again, at an angle.

If you love flowers and enjoy floral design you won't want to miss the free three-hour Master Gardener class on Saturday, June 2nd. The class will cover cutting gardens, the best flower varieties to grow and how to take care of them once they have been cut. It starts at 9:00 a.m. and is held in the Veterans Memorial Building, 130 Placerville Dr., in Placerville.

Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome. The office is located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://ucanr.org/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.