

# Conditioning Flowers

1. **Re-cut stems** Pull or trim all leaves and thorns that will be below the water level in the container as they will cause bacteria to grow, shortening vase life. Most flowers benefit from warmer water temperatures (110°F) containing floral preservative (see below for specifics). Remove 2 inches from the bottom of each stem, always cut stems at a sharp angle. Store in clean containers of water containing floral preservative and store in a cool location for a minimum of 4 hours, over night is preferred.
2. **Flower food** helps to maintain the vase life of flowers. It is best to add it to the water when conditioning, in vase when arranging as well as when wetting floral foam. Do not use ferrous materials (zinc, copper, tin) in contact with solution. **Keep flowers in clean water** and re-cut ends every time you change water. Make sure the container is clean and free from bacteria. Some foods and cut fruits in the refrigerator can cause a negative reaction in the flowers from the gases they release (example: citrus may cause white/cream roses to turn brown.)
3. **Woody Stems** (E.g. *Roses, Mimosa, Eucalyptus, Beech, Yew, Pittosporum, etc.*) Stems should be cut at a sharp angle. Remove all the lower foliage which will be below the level of the water, and place the stems in a bucket filled with warm water, to which cut flower food has been added. One important thing to remember is that stem ends should never be hammered, as this causes damage to the tissues, which leads to a build up of bacteria, thus shortening the life of the material.
4. **Semi-Woody Stems** (E.g. *Chrysanthemums, Lilies, Carnations, Leatherleaf, Asparagus Fern, etc.*) These should be conditioned by cutting the stem ends at a sharp angle, removing all the lower foliage which will be below the level of the water, and placing the stem ends in a bucket about filled with warm water, to which cut flower food has been added. Special flower food is available for Lilies, and this should be used if possible.
5. **Soft Stems** (E.g. *Freesia, Hellebore, Anemone, etc.*) Condition as above, but deeper water should be used so that the flowers are immersed up to their necks. After a good overnight drink, the flowers can then be arranged.
6. **Hollow Stems** (E.g. *Delphiniums, Lupins, etc.*) Hollow stems are notorious for forming air-locks, as air enters the stem as soon as it is cut. Cut the stems at an angle and remove lower leaves as usual. Turn the stems upside down, and fill the hollow stem with tepid water. Plug the stem with cotton wool, or hold your thumb over it until it is placed in the bucket.
7. **Milky Stems** (E.g. *Poppies, Euphorbias, Poinsettias, Ficus, etc.*) these flowers secrete latex sap that oozes into the water and clogs the vascular system of other flowers in the container, preventing them from absorbing water and also can be an irritant if it comes into contact with the skin. For this reason, the ends of the stems need to be seared before the flowers are placed in the arrangement. There are two ways to accomplish this: Either dip the cut end of the flower in boiling water for 30 seconds or apply a flame from a match or candle to the precut flower stem for about 30 seconds. The stems of some flowers exude a milky substance, called latex, when cut. The cut stem ends can also be rinsed under running warm water to remove excess latex, before placing into warm water for conditioning.
8. **Bulbous Stems** (E.g. *Daffodils, Tulips, Bluebells, Hyacinths, etc.*) Most bulbous stemmed flowers are pulled, not cut, from the plant by the grower. This means that the end of the stem is often white and firm. The stem will often not drink from this white area; therefore, it should be removed completely, by cutting at an angle, as water can only be absorbed through the green part of the stem. Bulb flowers should be conditioned in cool to tepid water, unless the flowers are wanted open, as warm water speeds up the development of bulbous flowers. Special flower food for bulb flowers is available, and should be used if possible. **\*\*Special Note - Daffodil stems exude a poisonous sap when cut. This will kill other flowers if Daffodils are conditioned in the same water.** Therefore, they should always be conditioned separately. If they are being arranged in water, they should be arranged separately, but if being arranged in floral foam, this is not necessary, and they can be arranged together with other flowers.

## 9. Special Notes for certain types of material

- \* Shiny or smooth foliage should always be washed, as this removes any dirt and dust or pesticides.
- \* Single leaves (such as hosta) can be completely immersed in water to condition them.
- \* Grey foliage such as Santolina or Senecio, or woolly foliage such as Stachys lanata should never be fully immersed to condition it, as the water is absorbed by the grey covering and the color of the foliage would be spoiled.
- \* Avoid very new growth, such as spring foliage, as it is very difficult to condition, and does not last well.
- \* Flowers which sometimes wilt even after conditioning, (roses, for example), should have their stems re-cut, and the stem ends placed in very hot or near-boiling water. This destroys the air lock, and enables the plants to take up water again. The heads of the flowers should be wrapped in tissue paper or newspaper to protect them from the steam. When the flowers have revived, (usually after 1 to 2 hours) re-cut the stem ends, as the boiling water will have damaged them, and continue to condition overnight before re-arranging them. Do this only if you have a flower that is wilting after a day of conditioning.
- \* Carnations should have their stems cut between the node or joint, as they cannot take up water if cut or broken on the node.
- \* Tulips should be wrapped in newspaper when conditioning, to keep the stems upright, as tulips tend to "do their own thing" when being conditioned. Tulips continue to grow after being cut, and can grow up to 1" per day. They will always turn towards the light as well, and the flowers will turn upwards if arranged horizontally or almost horizontally.
- \* Some flowers, such as Gladioli, will always turn upwards at the tip if not arranged vertically. One way to avoid this happening is to carefully pinch out the top few buds, as it is only these which are affected.
- \* Clematis, Violets and Hydrangea benefit from complete immersion of the flowers to condition them. Lilac, Azalea, Philadelphus, Forsythia, Rhododendron, and other woody flowering stems, should have all the foliage removed, as it prevents sufficient water from reaching the flower head.
- \* Lilies should have their stamens removed before the pollen forms, to prevent staining of the petals, or clothes and furnishings.
- \* Mimosa should have the flower heads covered in a plastic bag while being conditioned, to prevent drying out.
- \* Sweet peas, Pansies and Primroses should not be sprayed, as this can disfigure the petals.
- \* The stems of Calla lilies will turn to mush if conditioned in deep water, store in shallow water.

Resources:

Retail Internet:

Newagefloral.com

[www.accentdecor.com](http://www.accentdecor.com) (minimum for new accounts \$300, \$150 on reorder)

[www.save-on-crafts.com](http://www.save-on-crafts.com)

Boston area wholesalers: [www.jacobsonfloral.com](http://www.jacobsonfloral.com)

[www.fallriverfloristsupply.com](http://www.fallriverfloristsupply.com)

# Flower Arranging Tools



**Floral Shears** The blades should be thin and very sharp to make a clean cut. Do not use standard scissors as they have thicker blades and will close the stem part way when cut.

**Floral Pruning shears** are used for cutting thick, fibrous stems and for thick woody stems such as hydrangea.

**Heavy-duty pruning shears** are used to cut branches.

**A stem stripper** is used to clean leaves, thorns and small branches from the main stem. Be careful not to strip and bruise the main stem, which would shorten the life of the flower.

**Floral or paring knife** is used to trim thorns, leaves, and small branching stems from the main stem.



**Floral adhesive tapes** There are a variety of floral tapes available which are very useful in flower arranging. These specialist tapes are waterproof and come in different widths and colors. Once adhered to a dry surface, it will remain firm and in place even when exposed to moisture. It sticks on pottery, metal, plastic, wood, glass, ceramics... almost anything.

- **Clear floral tape.** This is one of those little magic expert tricks. Use it for making grids over the opening of your container. Just crisscross pieces of tape across the mouth of the container. Then you can insert the flowers in the spaces between the pieces of tape. Clear Tape is perfect for creating a design grid to assist you in arranging flowers in vases or other containers in which foam is not used. Adheres to glass, ceramic, plastic, and metal.

- **Green or white waterproof tape.** is a pressure-sensitive tape ideal for securing wet foam to containers. Remains firm and intact, even when exposed to moisture.



**Floral stem tape**, a strong stretchable tape adheres to itself without sticking to your fingers. It is the ideal way to lengthen and strengthen stems. Use to create corsages, bouquets, headpieces, cascades, nosegays or boutonnieres. As the tape is stretched, the adhesive material is activated. Stretch the material as you wrap it around fresh, dried or silk flower stems.

**Florist's fix** is a waterproof clay-like substance great for holding containers or foam in place.

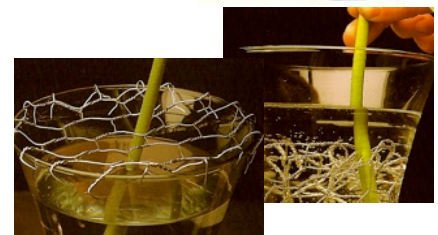


**Floral wire** comes in handy for so many things such as wiring flower heads. comes in different gauge sizes, colors and styles. The higher the gauge number the more flexible and thinner the wire is. Floral wires come covered and uncovered as well as in different painted colors.



**Floral Adhesives** are designed especially for gluing foliage and flowers without harming them.

**Medium-gauge wire mesh** crumpled into a loose ball and placed inside a container help support heavy-stemmed flowers and foliage better than foam. Plastic-coated wire mesh protects the stems from tearing.



**Water picks** can be useful in providing water for individual blossoms and you can add extensions to stems you'd like longer.

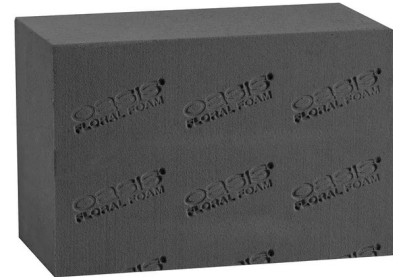


**Floral foam**- is foam which imitates the cell structure of a flower stem and serves to provide structure to the arrangement by holding up the flowers. As well, it hydrates the flowers for a long period of time, increasing longevity. The company sells a variety of foam and floral design products under one of the best known brands OASIS. [www.smithersoasis.com](http://www.smithersoasis.com)



## Enhanced Biodegradability

**Maxlife** -proven to provide as long, or longer, flower life than flowers in a vase of water. Keeps flowers fresher longer than any other floral foam -- up to 50 percent longer.



"Midnight"

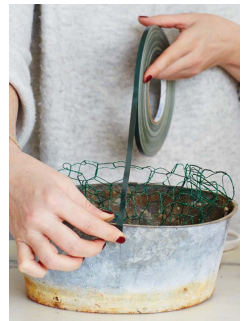
**Preparing foam:** Use the "float soak" method - place the foam on the surface of the water (mixed with nutrient mixture, placed into water with the holes facing down. Let the foam absorb the mixture until it rests at the surface. **Do not forcibly submerge**, as this will result in dry spots, which deny flower stems of hydration. Floral foam should be soaked only once. Make sure the foam remains moist by topping it off with water when necessary.

**SAHARA**- They also make a product called **sahara** which does not absorb water and is intended for use with artificial and dried flowers.

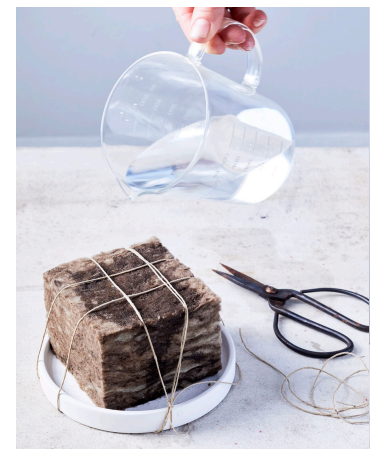
## A Guide to Floral Foam Alternatives from Flower Magazine and other sources:

Today's floral designers can choose from many foam alternatives, all of which leave a smaller footprint on the environment than foam while still supporting both traditional and modern designs.

- 1) **Chicken wire and tape grids** - Two of the most cost-effective mechanics are chicken wire and waterproof floral tape. However, where they differ is in allotted flower openings, which are more open with chicken wire and more restrictive with tape, based on a pre-determined grid.
- 2) **Holly Pillow** - The Holly Pillow is a convenient, reusable floral foam alternative designed by Holly Heider Chapple. "First and foremost, blooms respond best to being directly in water. The Holly Pillow is reusable and recyclable and does not contain microplastics, one of the main issues with floral foam," Holly says.
- 3) **FloraGUPPY** - "a 100-percent reusable and recyclable flower arrangement holder made from malleable plastic." One of its best properties is that it makes it easy to change water in the vase without destroying the shape of your arrangement. When you lift the flowers, they are held together by the FloraGUPPY, which is a big advantage when transporting arrangements during an event."



- 4) **Agra-wool** - This 100-percent biodegradable floral foam alternative from Netherlands-based Agra-Wool International is available in the U.S. through **New Age Floral**. Made from spun fibers of basalt (a volcanic rock) and a plant-based binder, this product, Agra-Wool claims, “absorbs and holds water better than traditional foam.” These factors have led to increased popularity among environmentally conscious floral designers looking for a foam-free option that can serve as a water source when it’s not possible to use a watertight vessel. Agra wool was originally designed for growing plants, and it was suggested to use a flower arranging material but Agra Wool was not originally designed for Flower Arranging.



- 5) **Oasis Fibrefloral** - Made from natural volcanic basalt rock with a bio-based binder derived from rapidly renewable materials. • Excellent water storage capacity, fast soaking, optimal pH range for most flower types, natural color, excellent flower life for most flower types, reusable for growing plants from cuttings and seeds. Unlike Agra Wool it is specifically designed for Floral design not just growing plants. But its density, saturation and capacity to grip flower stems has made it a perfect alternative to use instead of floral foam. Once you make a hole or insert or take out a flower, the hole is permanent and will not vanish. Repeated repositioning of flowers in Fibre Floral design Media will weaken its structure and will result in collapse of the block. It takes less than 15 seconds to fully soak a block of fibre floral design media, and it is recommend that you top up regular to prolong the life of your fresh flowers.



- 6) The **OshunPouch** from **New Age Floral** - This newcomer on the market is the brainchild of Kirsten Vandijk of Sudbury, Massachusetts created “a 100% biodegradable and home compostable stabilizing hydration mechanic with superior insertion hold.” The benefits are manyfold. The water-holding medium is renewable coir—the fiber from the outer shell of the coconut, which is commonly used to amend garden soil. Because the pouches expand to full size only when hydrated for use, they are practical to ship and store.



- 7) **Flower Frogs** - Flower frogs, also called "kenzan," originated from Ikebana, the ancient Japanese art of flower arranging. Floral frogs naturally open the stems of flowers, allowing them to take in more water and last longer, it is reusable, and relatively easy to clean and repair, and it is refreshingly low cost. You can find flower frogs in an assortment of shapes and styles.



**Pan melt glue pot** is a small electric pan, or glue skillet that you can either melt small pellets or (if it comes with an attachment) broken glue sticks at a low temperature. Use it for placing your foam by waiting until the glue is melted, but not hot, dip the four corners of the floral foam into the glue, and push it onto the bottom of the container. Pan melt glue is also used to secure the ends of silk flowers in foam when making large arrangements. Dip the ends of the flower stems into the pan glue before inserting into the floral foam.



**OASIS UGlu™ Adhesive Dashes** bond all types of surfaces together. Combining the strength of adhesive with the convenience and ease of a tape, OASIS UGlu bonds even rough and uneven surfaces instantly, without the wait, mess or hassle

- Bonds instantly to: Plastics, Metal, Styrofoam®, Fabric, Wood, Glass, Ceiling Tile, Brick or most exterior surfaces, Granite, Paper, Drywall, Laminates
- Instant bond & permanent hold
- Easy-to-peel off
- Non-Toxic & Acid Free
- Waterproof & weatherproof
- Can be cleanly removed
- Three sizes:
  - One thousand 1/2" x 5/8" **dashes** on a roll
  - A continuous **roll** of 3/4" x 65' adhesive
  - A box of 250 1" x 3" **strips**



**Anchor pins** or foam prongs secure the floral foam firmly to the bottom of a vase. Affix the pin to the bottom of the vase with hot glue or waterproof clay. Then press the foam into the pins of the prong.



**Mild soap and bleach** are used to clean flower containers thoroughly. A drop of bleach with mild soap cleans any residue and kills bacteria that might inhibit the life of flowers. Rinse well after cleaning.

**A meat baster** can be useful to keep containers filled and stems in deep water.

**A spray mister** is used to cool flowers and provide an extra source of water and moisture.

**Commercial hydrating solutions** are an excellent way to extend the life and bloom color of most flowers. Buckets: Deep buckets are indispensable for conditioning fresh flowers and storing bunches of dried flowers.

**Clear Crowning Glory® hydration** and protection spray keeps arrangements fresher by forming a liquid shield that holds in moisture which reduces water loss, keeping flowers more vibrant and helps prevent browning.



[www.sarahboynton.net](http://www.sarahboynton.net)