

Slug: Ask the Master Gardener
Date: Mar. 25, 2007
Contact: WSU/Skagit County Extension: 428-4270

It is spring again and those bunches of tulips, daffodils, and iris are impossible to resist. To increase the longevity of cut flower arrangements, follow these simple guidelines.

Make sure any containers planned to use as vases are washed in hot, soapy water and rinsed well. Bacteria in unclean containers can multiply and clog the water conducting cells in the flower stems.

With a sharp knife or scissors, cut approximately one half inch from the stems. The angle of the cut does not matter, as long as the stem can absorb water freely. Do not crush the stems. This will not increase the flower's ability to absorb water. Do remove excess foliage, leaving no leaves beneath the water line. Decay of these materials in the water also causes bacterial build up, again clogging water conducting tissues.

Next, place the flowers in warm water, about 110 degrees. Warm water is absorbed easily by the stems and quickly replaces lost moisture. Let the water cool naturally. To prevent tulip stems from sagging, bunches can be left in their wrappers for a few hours, while undergoing the warm water treatment. Once the water has risen up the stems, they will retain their upright position more easily.

Daffodils exude a substance that is toxic to tulips, so refrain from putting them in the same vase right away. Instead, keep them in separate containers for 24 hours, rinse the stems, then combine them in fresh water. Recutting the stems and placing flowers in warm water every other day or so can prolong the life of your bouquet. Commercial flower preservatives can also be used to this end.

Keep arrangements out of the direct sunlight and away from drafts and heat sources. In these situations, moisture is removed from the flowers faster than they can absorb it, causing them to dry up. At night, or when not in use, keep flowers in a cool place. If a refrigerator is used for flower storage, keep in mind that some fruits and vegetables produce ethylene gas, which can "burn" the blooms. When flowers are retrieved, cold water should be emptied out and replaced with warm water.

One of the wonderful things about living in the Skagit Valley is having access to these beautiful blooms. These tips should help them last longer.

The information provided in this news release is for education purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names is made with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by WSU Extension is implied. WSU Extension programs and employment are available to all without discrimination.

This column is written by Washington State University/Skagit County certified Master Gardeners. Questions may be submitted to WSU/Skagit County Extension, 306 S. First Street, Mount Vernon, WA 98273-3805.