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Bouquet tips for prolonging Valentine's Day flowers

Floral bouquets are a welcome gift this time of year. All bouquets will eventually die, but the following tips can help lengthen the life of your arrangement. First, cut the stems of the bouquet as soon as you get them. Plants clot wounds much in the same way our immune systems do, so making a fresh cut will break the plug and allow water to be taken up into the stem to delay wilting.

You should also use a sharp knife instead of scissors. Cutting the stem with scissors will pinch the tissue, making it harder for water to be taken up the stem to prevent wilting. Only 1" should be taken off with any single cut. Additionally, the cut should be made while the stem is underwater. When the cut is made, air will rush into the stem to fill the area of lower pressure. By cutting the stem underwater, water will flow into the stem instead of air, and give you a head start on prolonging the life of your arrangement.

Flowers come in two forms – arrangements and loose stems. There are several additional steps to care for loose stem bouquets that you won't have to worry about if you're buying a pre-made arrangement. The most important is plant food. Typically, loose stem bouquets will come with plant food to add to the eventual container, whereas arrangements will already have plant food added to the water of the container they come in. If you can't get your loose-stemmed bouquet into your food solution right away, store the flowers in a cool place.

When it's time to put the flowers in their new home, follow the directions on the plant food package to make the nutrient solution. Prep the flowers by cutting the stems as described previously, and remove any leaves that will be below the water line to prevent bacterial growth. Flowers that come as arrangements will already have this done, taking a lot of the work out of keeping your flowers healthy.

Flowers that have wilted may have plugged its previous cut up again, and will need a new cut to draw up more water. To prevent wilting, keep the flowers in a cooler area, away from ceiling fans, vents, direct sunlight, and radiators. This will reduce the water loss from the flowers. Water should be replaced at least once every other day, and immediately when the water becomes cloudy. If the flowers still wilt, increasing humidity in the room where the bouquet is stored will also prolong the flowers, as plants lose less water in high-humidity environments. If flowers continue to wilt even in this environment, they may be exposed to too much ethylene

gas. Move away from any fruits or vegetables, and make sure furnaces and fireplaces are venting properly.

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