

CUT & CARE GUIDE

In order for freshly harvested flowers to stay vibrant, their stems need to be kept clear so they can freely take up water. Dirt and bacteria can quickly clog up and prevent the flow of moisture, resulting in wilted stems and a shortened vase life. The following practices, utilized here at Floret and by other professional growers, will effectively prevent premature wilting and extend the vase life of your cut flowers. Whether you are harvesting flowers for market or your dining room table, these tricks will help you get the maximum enjoyment out of your seasonal blooms.

ALWAYS USE CLEAN BUCKETS AND VASES

Thoroughly clean your buckets and vases with hot, soapy water prior to putting fresh cut flowers into them.

USE CLEAN, SHARP CLIPPERS

Rusty, dull flower clippers not only are frustrating to use, but they also can damage stems and reduce the vase life of your flowers. Be sure to invest in a pair of high-quality clippers (I always have my favorite snips, available in the Floret Shop, close at hand.)

HARVEST IN THE COOLEST PARTS OF THE DAY

Early morning or in the evening are the best times to cut flowers and foliage because this is when they are the most hydrated. Blooms harvested during midday heat wilt faster and have a harder time bouncing back than those cut during cooler times of day.

TAKE A BUCKET OF WATER WITH YOU INTO THE GARDEN

It's easy to get so caught up in the beauty of nature when harvesting that suddenly an hour passes and all of your little piles of flowers are strewn around the garden, wilting in the sun. By taking a bucket along, you can place flowers into water right away.



HARVEST AT THE PROPER STAGE

Each variety requires some special tricks, which I will share in the following profiles, but a good rule is to cut flowers when they are between one-third to one-half open and before they've been pollinated. Once the bees get to your blooms, the flowers will fade much faster. For foliage, it's important to wait until the stems are mature and firm. If picked too young, they won't last long in the vase, often wilting immediately.

On the following pages, you will find profiles for 100 of the most loved and commonly grown seasonal flowers, including the proper stage of harvest for each, plus special instructions and approximate vase life expectancy. My hope is that this reference guide will help you gain more confidence and success with your cut flowers.

WIMPY DRINKERS



A few really useful flowers and foliage have a hard time drinking immediately after harvest, but once plumped up, they make fantastic, long-lasting bouquet ingredients. For these, immediately after harvest, dip the bottom few inches of the stems into boiling water for 7 to 10 seconds (in a heat-safe container that you use only for flowers), at which point you will notice the stems changing color and texture; then place in cool water. This treatment works like magic for hydrating and perking up wilt-prone ingredients such as scented geranium, dusty miller, basil, honeywort, and hellebores.

NAME	VASE LIFE	STAGE OF HARVEST
ARTEMISIA	5 to 7 days	Harvest once stems have become firm and are no longer floppy when wiggled. Strip the lower third of foliage. Dry by hanging them upside down in a warm, dark place for 2 to 3 weeks.
BASIL (<i>OCIMUM BASILICUM</i>)	7 to 10 days	Harvest when stems begin to toughen, or as soon as flowers begin to form. It's especially wilt-prone, so be sure to cut during the coolest part of the day to minimize wilting. Do not put into the cooler or the foliage will turn black.
BEE BALM (<i>MONARDA HYBRIDA</i>)	7 to 10 days	Harvest when flower whorls begin to turn from green to purple. It's especially wilt-prone, so be sure to cut during the coolest part of the day to minimize wilting.
CLEMATIS	7 days	Harvest blooms when one-quarter of flowers on a stem have opened. For foliage, harvest when stems and leaves become leathery.
CORN COCKLE (<i>AGROSTEMMA GITHAGO</i>)	5 to 7 days	Harvest when 1 or 2 flowers on a stem are open.
CUP-AND-SAUCER VINE (<i>COBAEA SCANDENS</i>)	4 to 5 days	Harvest individual flowers just as they open.
DUSTY MILLER (<i>SENECIO CINERARIA</i>)	7 to 10 days	Harvest when stems are mature and firm. Foliage is especially wilt-prone, so be sure to harvest during the coolest part of the day.
FLOWERING TOBACCO (<i>NICOTIANA SPECIES</i>)	7 days	Harvest when one-third of flowers are open on a stem. Flowers are especially wilt-prone, so always harvest during the coolest part of the day.
FORGET-ME-NOT	5 to 7 days	Harvest when one-quarter of the flowers on a stem are open. It's especially wilt-prone, so be sure to cut during the coolest part of the day.

WIMPY DRINKERS

NAME	VASE LIFE	STAGE OF HARVEST
HELLEBORE	5 to 7 days	Harvest after the flower stamens are gone and seeds have begun to form. The more developed the seedpods, the sturdier and longer lasting the cut hellebore will be.
HONEYWORT (<i>CERINTHE MAJOR</i>)	7 to 10 days	Harvest once flowers are fully formed on arched stems, but before seeds start to form. It's especially wilt-prone, so cut during the coolest part of the day.
ICELAND POPPY (<i>PAPAVER NUDICAULE</i>)	5 to 7 days	Harvest when buds are just starting to crack open. Once the flowers open fully, they're prone to damage.
LOVE-IN-A-PUFF VINE (<i>CARDIOSPERMUM HALICACABUM</i>)	5 to 7 days	Harvest stems once they are covered in little green lanterns. It's especially wilt-prone, so cut during the coolest part of the day.
MINT	7 days	Harvest once the stems have become firm and are no longer floppy when wiggled. Strip the lower third of foliage.
ORACH (<i>ATRIPLEX HORTENSIS</i>)	7 to 14 days	Can be harvested in the foliage stage or once seedpods have formed. Seeded stems require no special treatment.
ORLAYA	7 to 10 days	Harvest when the flowers are half to fully open. If harvested earlier, the stems tend to wilt.
RED-LEAF HIBISCUS (<i>HIBISCUS ACETOSELLA</i>)	7 days	Harvest when the foliage is leathery and the tips are no longer floppy.
SCENTED GERANIUM (<i>PELARGONIUM SPECIES</i>)	7 days	Wait to harvest until the plants have matured enough for the stems to harden a bit. It's wilt-prone, so be sure to cut during the coolest part of the day and remove foliage from the lower half of the stems.
SHISO (<i>PERILLA FRUTESCENS</i>)	7 to 14 days	Harvest when the foliage has become thick and the stems are woody, or any time after a flower spike begins to emerge.
SOAPWORT (<i>SAPONARIA OFFICINALIS</i>)	7 days	Harvest when one-third of the flowers on a stem are open.
TICKSEED (<i>COREOPSIS LANCEOLATA</i>)	7 days	Harvest when two-thirds of the flowers on the stem have opened.

WOODY BRANCHES



Many shrubs and flowering trees with woody stems are great in bouquets but require a little bit of extra effort to ensure that they drink quickly. If the stems are thick, split the bottom 2 to 3 in (5 to 8 cm) of the stem ends with heavy-duty clippers, shown bottom left, then grasp one side of the sliced stem and twist it backward. Then place immediately in a bucket of cool water. Set the bucket in a cool, dark place for at least 6 hours before arranging.

NAME	VASE LIFE	STAGE OF HARVEST
CRABAPPLE	7 days	Harvest blooms when one-quarter of flowers are open on the stem, and strip the bottom third of foliage. Harvest fruit at desired size, and remove most of the foliage. For foliage, harvest when leaves are leathery.
FLOWERING BRANCHES	7 days	(Includes trees that bloom in spring, such as apple, cherry, and hawthorn.) Harvest blooms when one-quarter of flowers are open on the stem. Strip the bottom third of foliage.
FORSYTHIA (<i>FORSYTHIA</i> × <i>INTERMEDIA</i>)	7 to 14 days	For flowers, harvest stems when buds start to swell. For foliage, pick once leaves are mature. Forsythia foliage is a long-lasting cut (up to 2 weeks) if picked after it has firmed up and feels leathery.
HONEYSUCKLE (<i>LONICERA SPECIES</i>)	7 to 10 days	For flowers, harvest before buds open. For foliage, harvest once leaves are fully mature and strip off lower leaves. For vines, harvest as soon as blooms appear, or cut older, woodier stems for foliage; strip off lower leaves.
HYDRANGEA	7 to 10 days	Harvest when the flowers are completely open, and remove most of the foliage.
LILAC (<i>SYRINGA SPECIES</i>)	5 to 6 days	Harvest when one-half to three-quarters of the flowers on the bloom cluster are open, and immediately remove most or all of the leaves.
MOCK ORANGE (<i>PHILADELPHUS</i>)	5 to 10 days	Harvest when the flower buds are just opening. For foliage, pick once the leaves are leathery and firm.
NINEBARK (<i>PHYSOCARPUS OPULIFOLIUS</i>)	10 to 14 days	Harvest when the foliage is leathery and the tips are no longer floppy. For springtime flowers, harvest when the buds are colored but not yet open, and strip the bottom third of the stem.

WOODY BRANCHES

NAME	VASE LIFE	STAGE OF HARVEST
PIERIS	7 to 10 days	Harvest branches while the flowers are still in bud, before they have fully opened.
PRIVET (<i>LIGUSTRUM SPECIES</i>)	2 to 3 weeks	Harvest branches with leathery leaves or wait for the blue-black berries in the winter.
PUSSY WILLOW (<i>SALIX SPECIES</i>)	14+ days	Harvest branches when the catkins have swelled and the bud scales have dropped off. You can dry stems with full catkins before any yellow pollen has appeared, standing the stems upright in a cool room.
QUINCE (<i>CHAENOMELES SPECIES</i>)	7 to 10 days	Harvest stems when the flower buds are swollen and colored.
RASPBERRY	7 to 14 days	For berries, harvest before the fruit fully ripens. For foliage, harvest when leathery and firm.
ROSE	5 days	Harvest when the flowers are one-third to one-half open. If not arranging right away, store in a cooler until ready to use.
SMOKEBUSH (<i>COTINUS SPECIES</i>)	7 days	For flowers, harvest anytime after the cloud-like blooms are visible. For foliage, harvest when firm.
SNOWBERRY (<i>SYMPHORICARPOS SPECIES</i>)	7 to 10 days	Harvest berried stems while the berries are plump, before they fully ripen and soften. For foliage, harvest after the leaves become leathery.
SPIREA	7 to 14 days	Harvest when the flower buds have colored or as the first florets are opening. Long branches should be cut with no more than one-third of the flowers open. For foliage, harvest after the flowers have dropped and the leaves are leathery.
VIBURNUM	7 to 10 days	For snowball types, harvest when blooms are green. For all other flowering types, harvest when one-third of florets are open. Harvest berries before they fully ripen and become soft.

DIRTY FLOWERS



A handful of garden flowers have a bad habit of turning their vase water dark and murky overnight, even with floral preservative. Black-eyed Susans, yarrow, kale, chrysanthemums, and zinnias all fall into this category. To combat this, add a few drops of bleach to the water.

NAME	VASE LIFE	STAGE OF HARVEST
BLACK-EYED SUSAN (<i>RUDBECKIA SPECIES</i>)	7 to 10 days	Harvest when flowers are just beginning to open.
CHRYSANTHEMUM	14+ days	Harvest individual stems when the flowers are one-half to two-thirds open. For spray varieties, harvest when one-quarter of the flowers on a stem have opened.
KALE (INCLUDES ORNAMENTAL CABBAGE/KALE AND EDIBLE KALE)	14 days	For flowering types, harvest when flower heads resemble a rose blossom. Remove all of the lower leaves. For edible kale, harvest at desired size.
OREGANO	7 to 10 days	Harvest at any stage, whether in flower or when seed heads have formed.
STOCK (<i>MATTHIOLA INCANA</i>)	7 to 10 days	Harvest when half the florets on a stem are open. Change the water often to avoid a cabbage-like smell.
YARROW (<i>ACHILLEA MILLEFOLIUM</i>)	5 to 7 days	Harvest when at least three-quarters of the florets are open on the flower heads and pollen is showing. If picked too early, the flowers will wilt and not recover.
ZINNIA (<i>ZINNIA ELEGANS</i>)	7 days	Use the “wiggle test”: Grab the stem about 8 in (20 cm) down from the flower and gently shake it. If the stem is droopy or bends, don’t cut yet. If the stem is stiff and remains erect, it is ready to harvest. Do not put in the cooler.

SAP PRODUCERS



Some flowers emit a toxic sap that can damage other flowers if not handled properly. Wear long sleeves and gloves when harvesting these flowers, as their sap can irritate skin. Remove leaves that will be below the water line to minimize the build-up of bacteria, which will keep stem ends from drinking. In general, it's a good idea to cut the stems of each of these varieties to your desired length for bouquets and arrangements, then let them rest before using in design; do not recut, or sap will start flowing again.

NAME	VASE LIFE	STAGE OF HARVEST
EUPHORBIA	7 to 10 days	Harvest when flowers are fully colored but not completely open. Use caution and wear gloves when harvesting, as the sap is irritating to the skin and eyes.
NARCISSUS (INCLUDES DAFFODILS AND PAPERWHITES)	7 days	Harvest when blooms look like a goose neck and have not yet opened. Place stems in a separate bucket to rest for 3 to 4 hours to release sap. Do not recut stems after treatment.
POINSETTIA (<i>EUPHORBIA PULCHERRIMA</i>)	14+ days	Harvest when the flower bracts have started to color and before the tiny central flowers have completely opened. Remove green foliage. Use caution and wear gloves; the sap is irritating to skin and eyes.
TWEEDIA	7 to 10 days	Harvest when approximately 6 clusters of flowers are present on a stem and the first 1 or 2 clusters are open. Stems exude a milky sap; cut to desired length and place in a separate bucket to rest for 3 to 4 hours to release sap. Do not recut stems ends after treatment.

NO SPECIAL TREATMENT REQUIRED



By harvesting these flowers and foliage at the proper stage, you can expect the listed vase life and even extend it. Be sure to remove bottom leaves from the stems; leaves submerged in water will decay quickly, causing bacteria to build up in the water and prevent stem ends from drinking. Prior to arranging flowers, re-cut stems at a 45-degree angle to ensure the stem has maximum surface area to take up water.

NAME	VASE LIFE	STAGE OF HARVEST
AMARANTH	7 to 10 days	Harvest upright varieties when seed heads are three-quarters open. Harvest cascading varieties when tassels begin to elongate. Remove foliage so spikes and tassels are more visible.
ANEMONE	7 to 10 days	Harvest when buds are fully colored.
APPLE OF PERU (<i>NICANDRA PHYSALODES</i>)	7 days	Harvest once seedpods have formed, removing foliage so the lanterns are more visible.
ASTILBE	4 to 10 days	Harvest when one-half to three-quarters of the flowers are open and the uppermost buds are swollen and showing color. Immediately place cut stems in water. Astilbe is extremely ethylene sensitive; keep away from ripening fruit.
BABY'S BREATH (<i>GYPSOPHILA SPECIES</i>)	5 to 10 days	Harvest when 60 percent of the flowers on a stem are open.
BACHELOR'S BUTTON (<i>CENTAUREA CYANUS</i>)	6 to 10 days	Harvest when blooms are one-quarter to one-half open. If picking entire sprays, cut when half the flowers on a spray are open.
BELLS OF IRELAND (<i>MOLUCCELLA LAEVIS</i>)	7 to 10 days	Harvest once the green bells start to form along the stem; remove leaves from the lower half of the stem, as they will yellow prematurely.
BUPLEURUM	8 to 10 days	Harvest when flowers are fully open to avoid wilting.
CALENDULA	6 to 8 days	Harvest when flowers are three-quarters open. Foliage is sticky, so wear gloves when harvesting.
CALIFORNIA POPPY (<i>ESCHSCHOLZIA CALIFORNICA</i>)	3 to 4 days	Harvest when flowers are in colored bud stage. As old flowers fade and drop petals, new buds on the stem pop open, giving you at least a week's worth of flowers.

NO SPECIAL TREATMENT REQUIRED

NAME	VASE LIFE	STAGE OF HARVEST
CANTERBURY BELLS (<i>CAMPANULA MEDIUM</i>)	10 to 14 days	Harvest when just a few flowers are open on a stem.
CARNATION (<i>DIANTHUS CARYOPHYLLUS</i>)	Up to 14 days	Harvest when 1 or 2 flowers on a spray are open.
CELOSIA	10 to 14 days	Harvest once flower heads reach desired size, but before they go to seed. Strip 80 percent of the foliage off during harvest. Do not put into the cooler.
CHINA ASTER (<i>CALLISTEPHUS CHINENSIS</i>)	7 to 10 days	Harvest single-stemmed varieties when flowers are 50 percent open. For spray varieties, harvest when one-quarter of the flowers on a stem have opened.
CHOCOLATE QUEEN ANNE'S LACE (<i>DAUCUS CAROTA</i>)	6 to 8 days	Harvest when flowers have fully opened and lie flat, otherwise stems tend to wilt.
COLUMBINE (<i>AQUILEGIA SPECIES</i>)	6 to 8 days	Harvest when one-third of flowers on the stem have opened and before any begin to drop their petals.
COSMOS	5 to 6 days	Harvest when buds are just cracking but haven't fully opened. For double varieties, let open halfway before picking.
CRESS (<i>LEPIDIDIUM SATIVUM</i>)	7 to 10 days	Harvest when seedpods are fully formed and the top blooms have faded. Seed heads can be dried and used indefinitely.
DAHLIA	5 days	Cut when blooms are three-quarters open and put immediately into water. If flowers are wilting, place in very hot water, just off boiling, and leave in the water as it cools for one hour.
DELPHINIUM	7 to 9 days	Harvest when bottom one-third of flowers on the stem are open. Delphinium is extremely ethylene sensitive; keep away from ripening fruit.
ECHINACEA	7 to 10 days	Harvest flowers when outer petals are emerging around the cone. Harvest cones while still fully intact and remove outer petals. To dry cones, remove all petals and hang stems upside down in a warm, dark place for 2 to 3 weeks.
EUCALYPTUS	14+ days	Harvest once foliage is mature and tips are no longer droopy. Can also be dried and used indefinitely.

NO SPECIAL TREATMENT REQUIRED

NAME	VASE LIFE	STAGE OF HARVEST
FALSE QUEEN ANNE'S LACE (<i>AMMI MAJUS, A. VISNAGA</i>)	6 to 8 days	Pick when 80 percent of the flowers on a stem are open. Stems tend to wilt if harvested earlier. Can cause skin irritation, so wear long sleeves and gloves when harvesting.
FEVERFEW (<i>TANACETUM PARTHENIUM</i>)	7 to 10 days	Harvest when one-quarter to one-half of the flowers on a spray are open.
FOXGLOVE (<i>DIGITALIS PURPUREA</i>)	6 to 8 days	Harvest when just a few bottom blossoms are open, before the bees pollinate the flowers.
FREESIA	7 days	Harvest when 1 or 2 flowers on a stem are open. Freesia is extremely ethylene sensitive; keep away from ripening fruit.
FRITILLARIA	6 to 7 days	Harvest when one-half to three-quarters of the blossoms are open.
GEUM	7 days	Harvest when one-quarter to one-half of flowers on a stem have opened.
GLOBE THISTLE (<i>ECHINOPS</i>)	7 to 10 days	Harvest when a majority of the globe has turned blue, but before the flower petals begin to form. Foliage will yellow prematurely, so remove at harvest.
GODETIA (<i>CLARKIA AMOENA</i>)	7 days	Harvest when the first blossom on each stem opens. Although individual flowers only last a handful of days, they are quickly replaced with new blooms.
GOMPHRENA	14+ days	Harvest when the flowers have colored up and stems are firm. To dry flowers, let them open completely and hang upside down in a warm, dark place for a few weeks.
GRASSES	7+ days	Seed heads should be harvested as soon as they emerge, or after the pollen has shed.
HEUCHERA	7 to 10 days	For flowers, harvest when half the florets on a stem are open. For foliage, cut leaf stems at ground level for the longest stems.
HYACINTH	7 days	Harvest when one-third to one-half of the lower blossoms are open. Can be stored out of water in the cooler for 1 week with the bulb on. Remove the bulb when ready to use.
IRIS (<i>IRIS × GERMANICA</i>)	3 to 7 days	Harvest when flower buds have fully emerged from green sheaths and are showing color. Remove faded flowers, and buds will continue to emerge.

NO SPECIAL TREATMENT REQUIRED

NAME	VASE LIFE	STAGE OF HARVEST
LADY'S MANTLE (<i>ALCHEMILLA MOLLIS</i>)	7 to 10 days	Harvest when three-quarters of the flowers on a stem are open.
LARKSPUR (<i>DELPHINIUM CONSOLIDA</i>)	5 to 7 days	Harvest when one-third of the blossoms are open on a stem. Larkspur is extremely ethylene sensitive; keep away from ripening fruit.
LILY	7 to 10 days	Harvest when the buds are colored and the bottom flower is just beginning to open. Remove pollen anthers as the flowers mature to prevent staining.
LISIANTHUS (<i>EUSTOMA GRANDIFLORUM</i>)	10 to 14 days	Harvest when there are 2 or 3 open blooms on a spray.
LOVE-IN-A-MIST (<i>NIGELLA SPECIES</i>)	7 days	Harvest flowers when they are three-quarters open, or harvest pods when formed. Dry by hanging upside down in a warm, dark place for 2 to 3 weeks.
MARIGOLD (<i>TAGETES SPECIES</i>)	7 to 10 days	Harvest when the flowers are about half open, and strip off most of the foliage.
MIGNONETTE (<i>RESEDA SPECIES</i>)	5 to 7 days	Harvest when the bottom one-third of the flowers on a spire open, or let them bloom and pick after the seedpods mature. Stems are delicate and must be picked with care.
NASTURTIUM (<i>TROPAEOLUM MAJUS</i>)	7 to 10 days	Harvest the flowers just as they are opening. If using entire vines, harvest when the foliage becomes leathery or firm to the touch.
PANSY	5 to 7 days	Harvest when the flowers are starting to open. Stems lengthen over time.
PEONY	5 to 7 days	For the longest vase life, harvest when the buds feel like a soft marshmallow when squeezed. Can be stored out of water in the cooler for up to 2 weeks. Recut and place in water before using.
PHLOX	5 to 7 days	Harvest when just a few flowers are open, no more than half.
PINCUSHION FLOWER (<i>SCABIOSA</i>)	7 to 10 days	Harvest when the flowers are still in the bud stage or just beginning to open.
RANUNCULUS	7 to 10 days	Cut when the buds are colored and squishy like a marshmallow, but not completely open. Can be picked when more mature but will be more fragile during transport.

NO SPECIAL TREATMENT REQUIRED

NAME	VASE LIFE	STAGE OF HARVEST
SNAPDRAGON (<i>ANTIRRHINUM MAJUS</i>)	7 to 10 days	Harvest when just the bottom 2 or 3 flowers are open.
STRAWFLOWER (<i>BRACTEANTHA BRACTEATA</i>)	7+ days	Harvest when the flowers are half open and before they are pollinated. To dry, remove foliage and hang upside down in a warm, dark place until firm.
SUNFLOWER (<i>HELIANTHUS ANNUUS</i>)	7 to 10 days	Harvest as soon as the first petals on a bloom start to lift off of the central disk. Strip three-quarters of the leaves from the stem.
SWEET PEA (<i>LATHYRUS ODORATUS</i>)	4 to 5 days	Harvest when there are at least 2 unopened flowers at the tip of a stem. It's especially important to use flower food.
TOMATO	4 to 5 days	Harvest after all of the fruit has developed on a cluster, but before fully colored. Remove all the leaves, as they will wilt.
TULIP	7 to 10 days	Harvest when flowers are in bud, with a hint of color showing on the outer petals. For extended storage, leave the bulb attached and store upright out of water in a cooler up to 2 weeks. Remove the bulb when ready to use.