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## EC72-2017 Arranging Flowers

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# ARRANGING FLOWERS

EXTENSION SERVICE, UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE COOPERATING WITH THE  
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E. F. FROLIK, DEAN J. L. ADAMS, DIRECTOR

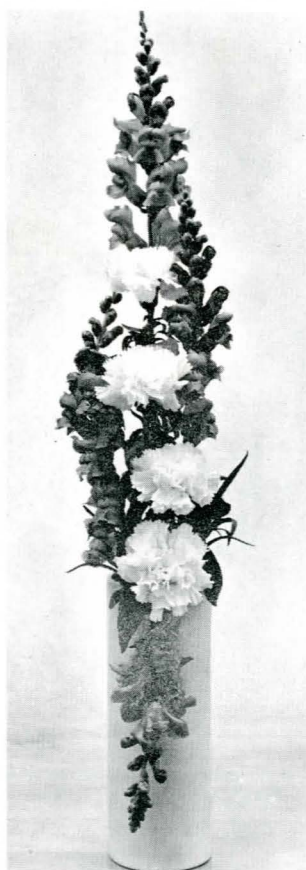




*Horizontal line arrangement of callas, passion flower vine, and calla leaves in a low container for a church altar.*



*Conventional triangular arrangement of red roses and a few sprays of cedar in a bowl.*



*Vertical line arrangement of snapdragons and carnations in a vertical container.*

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## ARRANGING FLOWERS

Flower arranging is an art based on natural forms. Nature designs and colors the flowers; you select the flowers and design the arrangement.

You may have natural talent for arranging flowers, but a few basic principles of design and color will help you. And, like other artists, you must be willing to practice.

When you have flowers in the garden, make one or more arrangements every day. Get acquainted with your flowers and flower types and learn the kinds of arrangements for which they are best suited.

## FORMS AND BALANCE FOR ARRANGEMENTS

You use the lines and types of balance found in drawings, paintings, and sculpture in planning the basic shape of your arrangement. Because lines form the skeleton of the arrangement, they are even more important than color and mass.

Lines may show strength and vitality or gentleness and delicacy. Lines can produce a rhythmic quality in an arrangement and give a feeling of motion. The way lines are arranged creates balance.

Most arrangements come under four main





*Naturalistic triangular arrangement of snapdragons and carnations.*



*Radial arrangement of gladiolus and roses in a shallow, round pottery container.*

types—vertical, horizontal, triangular, and radial. We sometimes hear of other forms, such as ovals, diagonals, crescents, and Hogarth curves, but these are slight variations of the four main types.

### *Vertical*

Vertical lines are the most natural to use because most plants and flowers grow vertically. These lines suggest growth and vigor. Putting long, narrow flowers in the middle of the vase gives a vertical feeling. The arrangement may be like an exclamation point demanding attention or it may have gentle curves expressing dignity.

### *Horizontal*

Horizontal lines are popular for table centerpieces and arrangements on coffee tables, mantels, or wherever the background demands a long, low design. These arrangements have a restful effect. Long, narrow flowers emphasize the horizontal lines and round flowers create the focal point or center of interest.

### *Triangular*

Triangular designs are a combination of horizontal and vertical lines to give a “two line” composition. These designs fit many places and can be made to be seen from all sides or from only the front.

*Conventional balance.* When the vertical line comes up from the center of the horizontal line, the triangle is the same on each side of the center. It has conventional balance. This type of balance is also called formal or symmetrical balance.

Placing a long, narrow flower along the vertical line and two long, narrow flowers along the horizontal line makes the skeleton or frame of the design. By changing the length of the horizontal and vertical lines, you may make a tall, narrow triangle or a low, flat one.

*Naturalistic balance.* When the vertical line is not in the exact center of the horizontal line, the two sides of the triangle are different. This is called naturalistic balance. It is also known as informal or asymmetrical balance.

This type of balance is often more interesting than conventional or formal balance. You may be more imaginative and also leave something for the imagination of the viewer. Often, with only a few flowers you can create a pleasant effect.

### *Radial*

Radial lines form part of a circle. The construction is like a wheel, with the spokes made by long, narrow flowers. The focal point is the hub of the wheel. Round flowers give contrast and create interest within the arrangement. This design has conventional balance.



## FLOWERS AND FOLIAGES

Before you gather flowers and foliages, have a clear mental picture of the type of arrangement you want to make. Consider the occasion and where the arrangement will be used as well as the season and the kinds of flowers available.

Try to use no more than three or four different kinds of flowers and foliages in one arrangement. Carefully select each flower or flower cluster for color, stem length, size, and suitability.

### *Types of flowers*

Three main types of flowers are used in arrangements — spikes, buttons, and background flowers:

*Spikes.* These have a narrow, straight look and pointed tips. Examples are gladiolus, snapdragon, stock, delphinium, rose buds, iris leaves, and grain heads. These flowers are put in the arrangement first and form the outline.

*Buttons.* These are round or round looking. Zinnias, marigolds, irises, open roses, petunias, carnations, and chrysanthemums are examples. These flowers are used to create an accent or focus and to break space into interesting patterns. They are put into the arrangement last.

*Background flowers.* These have fine textures and irregular outlines. Baby's breath, perennial statice, stevia, asparagus fern, and love-in-a-mist are examples. Background flowers add lightness and airiness to an arrangement. They are added after the spikes, but before the buttons. They must be used sparingly. Background flowers may be used, if available, but they are not as essential as the other two kinds.

### *Cutting flowers*

Flowers keep best when cut with a sharp knife or florists' shears. Regular scissors crush the stems. The cut should be clean and smooth and at any convenient angle.

For best results, cut flowers in the late after-

*Round and free-form bowls suited for low designs.*

*Rectangular and square bowls for low and angular types of designs.*

*Vases for vertical and tall triangular arrangements (top row), period and modern designs (center row), and tall, spreading arrangements (bottom row).*





noon or early evening when the plant is filled with stored food and the blooms are most fragrant. Put the flowers in warm water immediately.

The maturity of flowers affects their keeping quality. Roses, gladiolus, irises, poppies, and peonies should be cut in the bud stage, but flowers such as asters, dahlias, zinnias, marigolds, chrysanthemums, and delphiniums should be well opened.

### *Conditioning cut flowers*

Condition the flowers for several hours before you arrange them. Place them in warm water (100-110° F.) and keep them in a dark room that is cool, free from drafts, and reasonably humid. Use deep, clean containers, washed with soap and water and perhaps rinsed in a chlorine disinfectant. Remove all leaves that will be under water when the arrangement is made.

Treat poinsettias, poppies, and dahlias by inserting the end of the stem in boiling water for 30 seconds. Then place them in warm water, as for other flowers.

## CONTAINERS AND FLOWER HOLDERS

Select the bowl or vase and the flower holder with the same care you use in selecting the flowers.

### *Selecting bowls and vases*

The lines of the bowl or vase influence the lines of the arrangement. Except for arrangements to go with period settings, the container is usually less important than the flowers.

Here are some points to consider when you select containers:

**Shape.** Containers should have simple lines and good proportions. They should stand firmly without tipping. Often the shapes of the flowers and foliage will help in choosing a container with the proper lines.

**Texture.** Use light, fragile, smooth-textured containers for small, delicate flowers. Choose bold, sturdy, heavy looking containers for large, coarse flowers.

**Color.** Plain glass, copper, burnished silver, or neutral-colored containers are always suitable. If you use a colored container, choose one with a

subdued color and a dull finish. The color may be the same as the flowers or a contrasting or complementary color.

**Size.** Make sure the container is big enough to hold the flowers without crowding the stems and deep enough to hold an ample supply of water.

### *Selecting flower holders or frogs*

Flower holders are available in many types. When you buy, look for holders that:

- Hold flowers rigidly at the needed angles with minimum injury to the stems.
- Weigh enough to keep from tipping over when they hold heavy flowers.
- Hold both large and small stems firmly.
- Resist rust and do not discolor water.
- Are not too difficult to conceal.

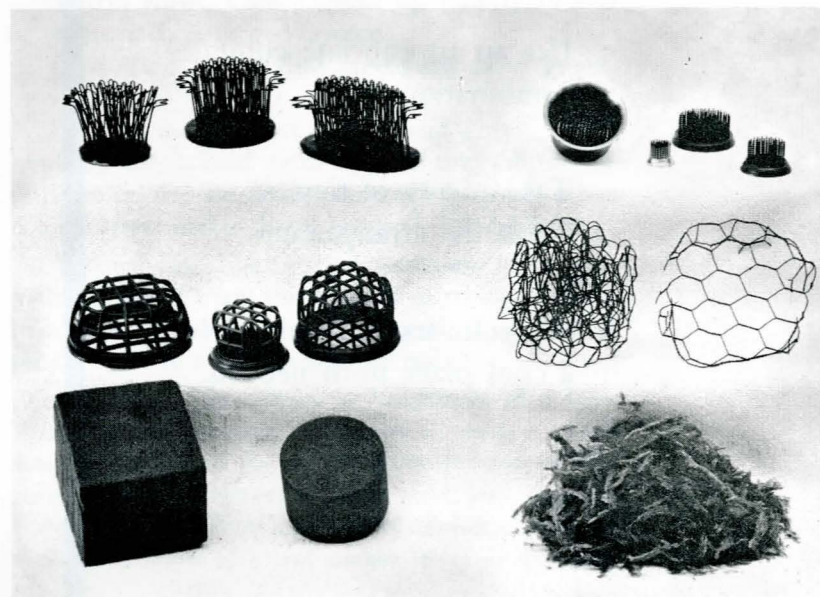
The common types of holders have both good and bad points:

**Hairpin holders.** These have most of the desirable qualities. They are made of brass wire shaped like hairpins and set into a lead base. They are especially good for bowl arrangements.

**Needlepoint holders.** These are available in many sizes and shapes. However, it is difficult to put flowers in at extreme angles, particularly flowers with hollow stems.

**Bird-cage holders.** These holders do not injure

*Hairpin and needlepoint holders (top row); bird-cage holders, chicken wire (center row); floral foam, shredded styrofoam (bottom row).*



## TO MAKE AN ARRANGEMENT

1. Consider the occasion.
2. Have a clear mental picture of the type of arrangement you want to make.
3. Gather and condition the flowers and foliages.
4. Select the right container, flower holder, and any other equipment you need.
5. Arrange the flowers.

Follow basic principles of design.

Use an appropriate color combination.

Take plenty of time to finish the arrangement.

6. Put your arrangement in a cool place until needed.

the flowers and hold them at several angles, but not always at the exact angle desired.

*Chicken wire.* This may be used in vase and basket designs alone or along with shredded styrofoam. It is available at hardware stores.

*Floral foam.* This is a moisture-holding material which is strong enough to support flower stems inserted into it. It comes in cylinder or brick forms that can be easily tailored with a knife to fit the container.

*Shredded styrofoam.* This is a porous plastic material that will not absorb water. It is packed into the vase to hold the flowers in place.

Use floral clay to fasten metallic-base holders to the bottom of the bowl. To be certain the clay holds, make sure the container, frog, and clay are all dry.

## PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN

All the parts of a design must be related to each other and to the whole. Here are some basic principles you will want to keep in mind when you create any flower arrangement.

### *Scale*

The apparent size and visual weight of each part should be in scale with the rest of the arrangement. This includes the flowers, the foliage, and the container. In addition, the arrangement must be in scale with its surroundings.

As a general guide, the flowers and foliage should be  $1\frac{1}{2}$  times as high as the average width of a low container or bowl or  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to 2 times as high as the height of an upright container or vase.

Although the flowers must be in scale with each other, it is possible to use small flowers with large ones if you group the small flowers together.

### *Unity*

Every flower and stem should appear as though it actually belongs to the arrangement. There should be no straying elements or parts.

Unity is easiest to achieve if you limit yourself to a small number of flowers and only a few different kinds. This also keeps the flowers from being crowded and allows them to retain their individuality.

The flowers should have something in common with each other. Avoid using exotic or unusual flowers with ordinary garden flowers. Leaves



which grow naturally with a flower will blend better than leaves from another species.

Each arrangement should have one main color. You may use more than one color, but a single hue should always be dominant.

### *Harmony*

Most of us notice lack of color harmony, but harmony of texture, shape, and design also contribute to the success of an arrangement. When all the parts harmonize, each complements the other and shows it off to best advantage.

The container should harmonize with the flowers and plant materials in design, weight, and feeling. The flowers and foliage should have something in common with each other in size, shape, texture, idea, time of flowering, or color. In addition, the arrangement should harmonize with its immediate setting.

### *Balance*

Balance makes a design look stable. The highest point of the arrangement should be directly above the visual center or focal point—or as close to this as possible.

Dark-colored flowers are visually heavier than light-colored ones and should usually be kept low and near the center of the arrangement. Texture and shape affect visual weight, too. Coarse-textured flowers seem heavier than fine-textured ones and round flowers look heavier than long, narrow ones.

### *Rhythm*

Rhythm is a visual effect that suggests motion. The eye should move from one point to another in a natural and rhythmic order. This effect can be created by using several flowers of the same color or shape or by using the same flower in different sizes.

All the lines in the arrangement should contribute to the rhythmic effect. There should be no crossed stems to interfere with the sweeping motion of the eye.

### *Repetition*

Form, texture, color, and kinds of plant material need to be repeated to assist in achieving unity. Without repetition, there will be an undesirable feeling of isolation and a lack of coherence in the design.

### *Focus*

Every arrangement needs a focal point—a center of interest where all the lines in the design come together.

This point should usually be low in the design. In a conventional or formal arrangement, it is low and in the center. In a naturalistic or informal arrangement, it is where the imaginary vertical and horizontal lines cross.

The focal point can be accented by using a sharp contrast in form, size, or color. A large, rich-colored flower will often provide the necessary emphasis.

## COLOR IN ARRANGEMENTS

### *The language of color*

Color has a language of its own. Here are some terms you will want to know as you work with color:

*Hue.* The quality or difference between one color and another, as red and yellow.

*Primary hues.* Red, yellow, and blue. All other hues can be made by mixing these in various proportions.

*Secondary hues.* Orange, green, and violet. These result when two primary hues are mixed in equal amounts.

*Intermediate hues.* These result when a primary hue and a secondary hue are mixed in equal proportions. Yellow-green and blue-violet are examples.

*Warm hues.* Colors made up mainly of red or yellow, such as red-orange.

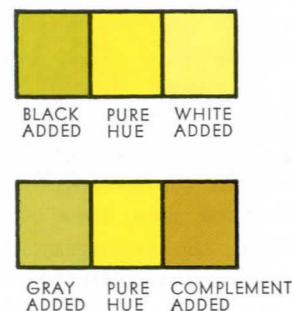
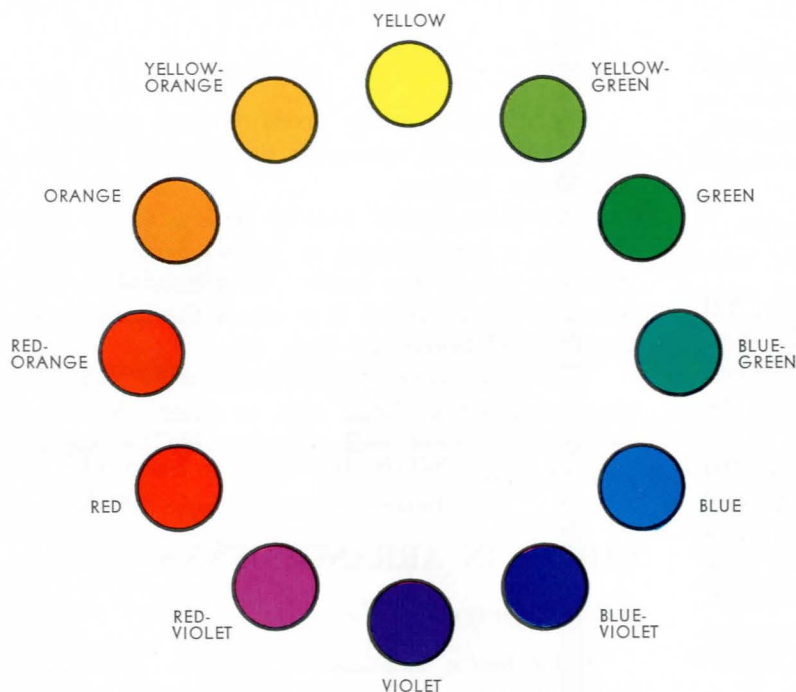
*Cool hues.* Colors that are mostly blue, green, or violet.

*Neutral hues.* Black, white, and gray. When neutrals are mixed with colors, they dilute or dull the colors. But when they are put near other colors, they make them brighter by contrast.

*Value.* The lightness or darkness of a hue. Value depends upon the amount of white or black in a hue. If white is added to red, the result is pink. Pink is a light value of red.

*Intensity.* The purity or brightness of a hue. When a hue is mixed with gray or with a small amount of a hue from the opposite side of the color wheel, it becomes duller and less intense. Pure yellow is clear and bright. Adding gray or a small amount of violet makes it softer and less intense.





## Color harmony

Color harmony will be important in every arrangement you make. You will probably find harmonies of related hues easier to master at first:

*Single-hue harmony.* The use of one color in different values and intensities, such as dark blue and light blue. These are always safe combinations.

*Analogous harmony.* A combination of colors that lie near each other on the color wheel. Orange, yellow-orange, and yellow are analogous colors.

Harmonies of contrasting colors are more striking, but must be done carefully, with each color in the right amount. One of the colors should generally predominate:

*Complementary harmony.* A combination of two colors that are directly opposite on the color wheel. Yellow and violet are complementary colors. So are orange and blue.

*Double complementary harmony.* The use of two colors that lie side by side on the color wheel with their complements. For example, orange and yellow-orange with their complements of blue and blue-violet.

*Split complementary harmony.* A combination of a color with the two colors on either side of its complement. For example, yellow with red-violet and blue-violet.

*Triads.* Three colors that are an equal distance apart on the color wheel. Red, blue, and yellow are a triad. So are violet, green, and orange.

## THE FINISHING TOUCH

Good design and color harmony alone do not guarantee a successful arrangement. You must also give some attention to the final details or "finish" of the arrangement.

The way the frog or holder is hidden is a part of finish. If the water surface in the bowl shows, keep it clean and free from pieces of leaves, petals, and other debris.

Keep the arrangement in a cool room at night and change the water daily. You may use a meat baster or syringe to change the water without disturbing the arrangement.

To keep the flowers fresh as long as possible, never expose the arrangement to direct sunlight or drafts. Commercial flower foods are satisfactory only for certain flowers—roses and carnations, for instance—and then only if the water is soft.

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