

# Care of Fresh Flowers and Holiday Plants

Each year, more and more Alabamians enjoy fresh flowers and flowering potted plants in their homes at holidays and for special occasions. Producers are growing higher quality plants today, and they are available from a wide variety of retail outlets.

Fresh flowers and flowering potted plants have a limited life, but, with proper care, your enjoyment of fresh flowers and plants can be extended from several days to several weeks. Proper care and handling are important, but selecting a high quality flower or plant in the retail outlet is also important.

The following care and handling tips may help you better select and care for your fresh flowers and flowering potted plants. The longer you can enjoy them in your home, the better the value for your money.

## Common Name. Easter lily

**Scientific Name.** *Lilium longiflorum*

**Bloom Season.** Early to mid-spring. Available before the Easter season.

**Flower Color.** White flowers with yellow anthers. You can remove the anthers, as they reduce the life of the bloom. Take care when removing them, though, because they can stain fingers and clothing.

**Varieties Or Cultivars.** Nellie White and Ace are two excellent lilies. The Easter lily can reach a height of 2 to 4 feet, depending on the variety or cultivar.

**Foliage.** Waxy, thin, pointed green leaves emerge out of the Easter lily stalk.

**Flowers.** Large, trumpet-shaped flowers radiate from all sides of the top of the plant. One lily can produce from three to eight flowers, generally once each year. It is difficult to make the lily re-flower. It is best to discard the plant after the flowers fade and die.

**History.** The Easter lily grows naturally along the coast of Okinawa. Some Japanese refer to



the Easter lily as the "gun lily" because of the shape of the flower. Japan closed its borders to the western world in the 1600s and 1700s, so the Easter lily was introduced to the West only in 1819. In the Christian faith, the Easter lily's white flower represents purity and newness of life.

**Plant Selection.** Check the following list when choosing an Easter lily:

- Dark green foliage all the way to the base of the plant.
- Buds in the "puffy white" stage. This means that they are showing color (puffy white) but not fully open. Flowers will open relatively quickly in the warmth of the home if they are purchased in the puffy white stage. Open flowers will last a few days less than ones purchased in the puffy white stage.

- A plant that can support its own weight and does not need a stake or wire in the pot to support it.

- A plant without disease or insect problems—disfigured or discolored new or older leaves (shriveled or yellowed leaves), or damaged stems, leaves, or flowers.

**Plant Care.** After bringing the plant home, you need to take several steps to keep it healthy and flowering. While all plants and flowers have a limited life, you should enjoy an Easter lily for 2 to 3 weeks by following these recommended care and handling tips.

**Light**—Bright, indirect sunlight is recommended to keep the plant alive, but direct sunlight will cause the blooms to fade. Hold the plant indoors in indirect sunlight (through a curtain) and display it for shorter periods of time in areas of less light, such as on the dining room table.

**Water**—Water only as the plant needs it, when the potting mix becomes visibly dry. Irrigate with enough water to allow some to come out the bottom of the pot. Be careful not to allow the potting mix to become too dry, as it will not easily become wet again. Be sure that the plant does not stand in water, or disease problems may result.

**Fertilizer**—Fertilizer will not be needed on lilies.

**Temperature**—Lilies will survive best at a minimum temperature of 60°F and a maximum temperature of 80°F.



**Maintenance**—Remove all dead leaves and faded blooms and keep the foliage dry to help prevent disease and insect problems.

**Usage.** The Easter lily cannot be grown outside in Alabama. It is difficult to force the lily to flower again. It is best to discard the plant after the flowers fade and to replace it with a new plant during the next Easter season.

## Common Name. cyclamen

**Scientific Name.** *Cyclamen* spp.

**Bloom Season.** The cyclamen is produced for sale at Christmas, Valentine's Day, and Mother's Day.

**Flower Color.** Pink, red, lavender, and white.

**Varieties Or Cultivars.** Merry Widow, white with purple eye; Gypsy, salmon to red; Swan Lake, white; and Rosamunde, rose pink.

**Foliage.** Bluish green, waxy, heart-shaped leaves have a silver ring near the margin. The foliage makes an attractive plant for up to 6 weeks after flowering.

**Flowers.** The flower is on a tall stalk and is turned (reflexed) backward, resembling a candle snuffer. The flower ranges from small to large and can be fringed, crested, frilled, and single or double. They usually bloom for up to 4 weeks. When flowering, cyclamen perform better at temperatures of 55° to 65°F.

**History.** Cyclamen has been around since at least the 1400s. It was transported to the United States in the 1800s. Cyclamen is a very popular European plant and is gaining in popularity in the United States.

**Plant Selection.** Check the following list when choosing a cyclamen:

- A plant that has not been crowded by other plants during production; look for a full, well-rounded plant.
- Plants with a few flowers open and many buds visible either above or below the foliage.
- Plants without disease or insect problems—discolored new or older leaves (shriveled or yellowed).

### Plant Care.

**Light**—Bright, indirect sunlight is recommended to keep the plant alive, but direct sunlight will cause the blooms to fade. Hold the plant indoors in indirect sunlight (through a curtain) and display it for shorter periods of time in areas of less light, such as on the dining room table.

**Water**—Water only as the plant needs it, when the potting mix becomes visibly dry. Irrigate with enough water to allow some to come out the bottom of the pot. Be careful not to allow the potting mix to become too dry, as it will not easily become wet again. Be sure that the plant does not stand in water, or disease problems may result.

**Fertilizer**—Fertilizer will not be needed on cyclamen.

**Temperature**—Cyclamen will survive best at a minimum temperature of 40°F and a maximum temperature of 60°F. Cyclamen prefer cooler areas.

**Maintenance**—Remove all dead leaves and faded blooms and keep the foliage dry to help prevent disease and insect problems.

**Usage.** Cyclamen is an attractive plant for table decoration as it will not be too tall for a dining room table. Given proper care in cooler temperatures, cyclamen flowers may be enjoyed for 2 to 4 weeks. It is difficult to force the cyclamen to flower again as the plant requires a period of rest and cool temperatures before flowering. It is best to discard the plant after all the flowers have faded and to replace it during the next season with a new plant.

## Common Name. florist chrysanthemum

**Scientific Name.** *Chrysanthemum x morifolium*

**Bloom Season.** Florist chrysanthemums can be purchased any time of the year, but the largest selling time is Mother's Day. Florist mums are used for all kinds of occasions, from weddings and formal parties to corsages.

**Flower Color.** There is a tremendous range of colors, but the most commonly used are yellow, white, lavender, bronze, and pink.

**Foliage.** The dark-green leaves are lobed with teeth around the margin and soft hairs on the underside. The aromatic leaf of the mum can get up to 3-inches long. If you purchase a corsage, you probably will not see any natural foliage.

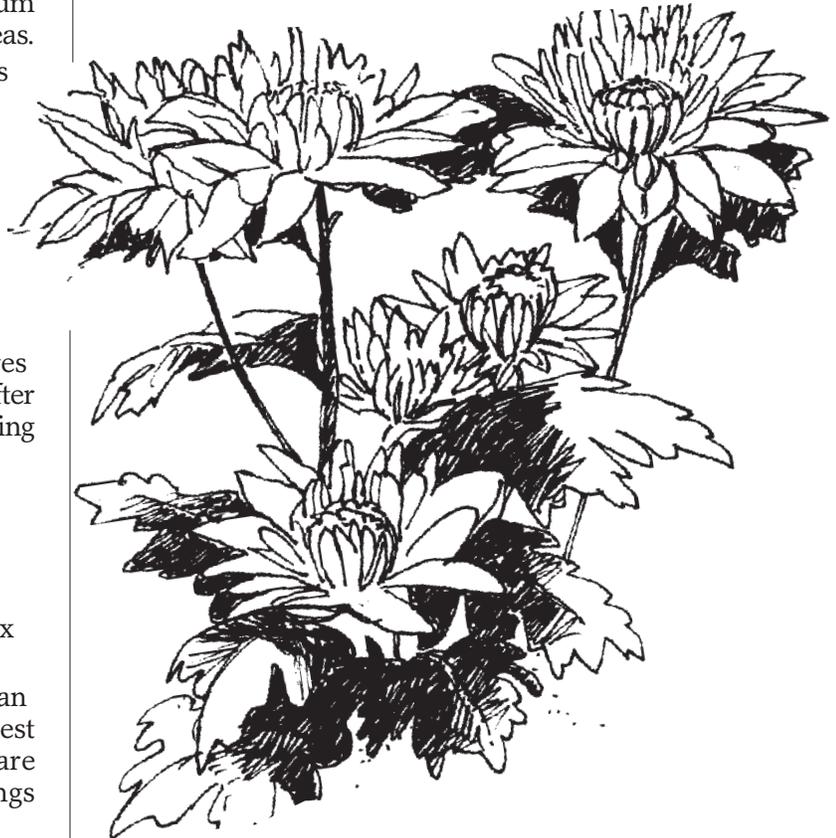
**Flowers.** The flowers of the mum are typically clustered at the top of the plant. There are several types of cushions: daisy, with wide daisy-like petals; spider, with narrow, lacy petals; spoon, with flat, spoon-shaped petals; feathered or quilled petals; and pompon—its large flowers with narrow, lacy petals are widely used for corsages.

**History.** The mum is native to China. The florist mum was introduced to Europe in the

mid-1800s and then brought to the United States in 1889.

**Plant Selection.** Check the following list when choosing a chrysanthemum:

- Dark green foliage all the way to the base of the plant.
- No more than 25 percent of the blooms open.
- A plant that has not been crowded out by other plants; crowding gives it a flat side or yellowing area.



- A plant that can support its own weight and does not need string or wire supports around it.
- A plant without disease or insect problems—disfigured or discolored new as well as established growth (shriveled or yellowed leaves), or damaged stems, leaves, or flowers.

**Plant Care.** After bringing the plant home, you need take several steps to keep it healthy and flowering. While all plants and flowers have a limited life, you should enjoy a fresh chrysanthemum for 4 to 6 weeks by following these recommended care and handling tips.

**Light**—Bright, indirect sunlight is recommended to keep the plants growing without fading the blooms.

**Water**—Water daily or as the plant needs it, when the potting mix becomes visibly dry. Irrigate with enough water to allow some to come out the bottom of the pot. Be careful not to let the potting mix become too dry, as it will not easily become wet again. Be sure that the plant does not stand in water, or disease problems may result.

**Fertilizer**—Fertilizer will not be needed on plants enjoyed indoors.

**Maintenance**—Remove all dead leaves and faded blooms and keep the foliage dry to help prevent disease and insect problems.

**Usage.** The chrysanthemum makes a nice accent in the home. The plant can be kept near a window to receive enough bright, indirect light and displayed in another part of the home for shorter periods of time. The chrysanthemum should have a life of 4 to 6 or more weeks in the home if given proper care. Flowering occurs only once per year as the chrysanthemum requires a specific period of light (long days followed by short days) to flower again. It is best to discard the plant after flowering is completed and replace it with a new plant.

## Common Name. florist azalea

**Scientific Name.** *Rhododendron* spp.

**Bloom Season.** The florist azalea blooms from early to late spring and is most commonly sold during the Easter season and for Mother's Day.

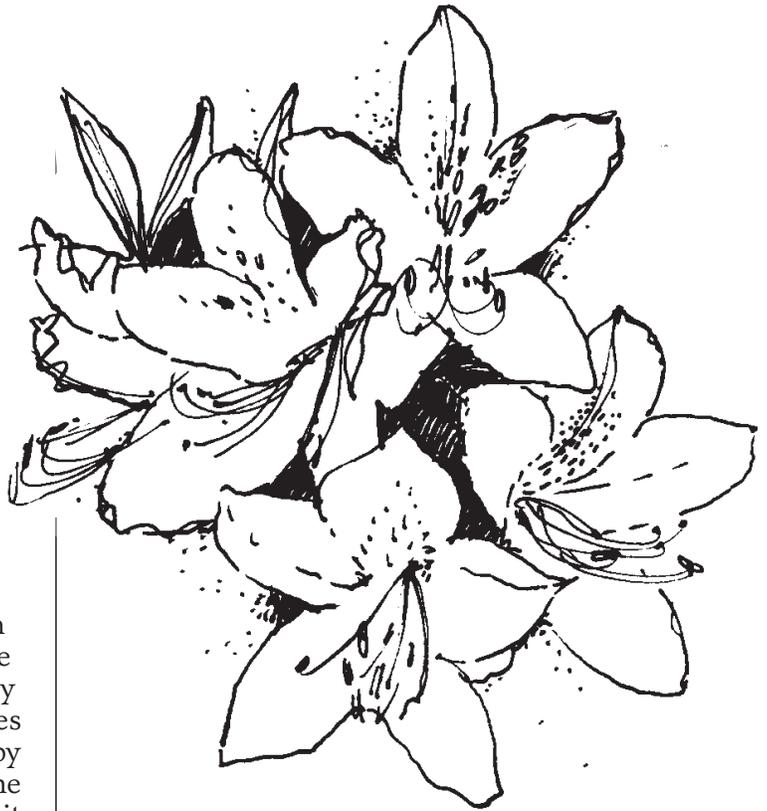
**Flower Color.** The florist azalea comes in all flower colors except blue.

**Foliage.** The foliage ranges from small and rounded to large and pointed. The leaf is ciliate (has small hair-like structures coming out the side of the margin) and slightly pubescent (has hair-like structures coming out of the upper side of the leaf).

**Flowers.** The flowers range from small to large, single, semi-double, and double forms. The petals of the flower are fused together in a star shape.

**Plant Selection.** Check the following list when choosing a florist azalea:

- Foliage all the way to the base of the plant and no long shoots coming out of the top of the canopy of the plant.
- No more than 25 percent of the blooms open.
- A plant that has not been crowded out by other plants; crowding gives a flat side or yellowing areas.
- A plant that can support its own weight and does not need string or wire supports around it.



- A plant without disease or insect problems—disfigured or discolored new as well as established growth (shriveled or yellowed leaves), or damaged stems, leaves, or flowers.

**Plant Care.** After bringing the plant home, you need to take several steps to keep it healthy and flowering. While all plants and flowers have a limited life, you should enjoy a florist azalea for 2 to 3 weeks by following these recommended care and handling tips.

**Light**—Bright, indirect sunlight is recommended to keep the plant growing without fading the blooms.

**Water**—Water daily or more often as the plant needs it, when the potting mix becomes visibly dry. Irrigate with enough water to allow some to come out the bottom of the pot. Be careful not to allow the potting mix to become too dry, as it will not easily become wet again.

**Fertilizer**—Fertilizer will not be needed on florist azaleas.

**Maintenance**—Remove all dead leaves and faded blooms and keep the foliage dry to help prevent disease and insect problems.

**Usage.** The florist azalea is a nice accent to almost any part of the house. The main concern is to keep the potting mix from drying out.

## Common Name. poinsettia

**Scientific Name.** *Euphorbia pulcherrima*

**Bloom Season.** Colorful bracts are visible from November to December. Small flowers are yellow.

**Flower Color.** The poinsettia is available in red, pink, white, and red and pink speckled, and pink and white speckled.

**Varieties Or Cultivars.** Glory is a common poinsettia that is available in many areas. Other popular reds are Supjibi, Freedom, and Celebrate.

**Foliage.** Leaves are widest near the middle (elliptical), dark green, and very smooth. The leaf also has a lobe near the base.

**Flowers.** The flower is made up of a cluster of small yellow flowers (cyathia) surrounded by a series of colored modified leaves (bracts).

**History.** The poinsettia is native to Mexico. The plant's significance as a symbol of purity came long before that with the Indians of Taxco during the time of Montezuma. The Indians used the plant to create dyes and medicines. Franciscan priests who settled Taxco began to

use the plant in the Fiesta of Santa Pesebre, a nativity procession, because of its great color and its seasonal bloom time. The poinsettia was first introduced to the United States in 1825 by J. R. Poinsett, ambassador to Mexico.

**Plant Selection.** Check the following list when choosing a poinsettia:

- Foliage all the way to the base of the plant.
- A plant that has not been stored for very long in a paper or plastic sleeve.
- No more than 25 percent of the cyathia open. You will be able to see small amounts of pollen collecting on the colorful bracts when many cyathia have opened.
- A plant that has not been crowded out by other plants—a flat side or yellowing area.
- A plant that can support its own weight and does not need string or wire supports around it.
- A plant without disease or insect problems—disfigured or discolored new as well as established growth (shriveled or yellowed leaves), or damaged stems, leaves, or bracts.

**Plant Care.** After bringing the plant home, you need to take several steps to keep it healthy and flowering. While all plants and flowers have a limited life, you should enjoy a



poinsettia for 4 to 6 weeks by following these recommended care and handling tips.

**Light**—Bright, indirect sunlight is recommended to keep the plant growing without fading the bracts.

**Water**—Water daily as the plant needs it, when the potting mix becomes visibly dry. Irrigate with enough water to allow some to come out the bottom of the pot. Be careful not to allow the potting mix to become too dry, as it will not easily become wet again.

**Fertilizer**—Fertilizer will not be needed on poinsettias.

**Maintenance**—Remove all dead leaves and faded bracts to help prevent disease and insect problems.

**Usage.** The poinsettia is not a poisonous plant. The American Medical Association has had no confirmed reports of serious or fatal injuries from the ingestion of poinsettia leaves, bracts, stems, or flowers. While the plant is not meant to be eaten, caution should be used when displaying plants around young children and pets. The leaves of poinsettia are very fibrous and can cause choking if caught in the throat. Enjoy colorful poinsettias by displaying them out of the reach of curious children and pets.

## Common Name. fresh-cut roses

**Scientific Name.** *Rosa* hybrids

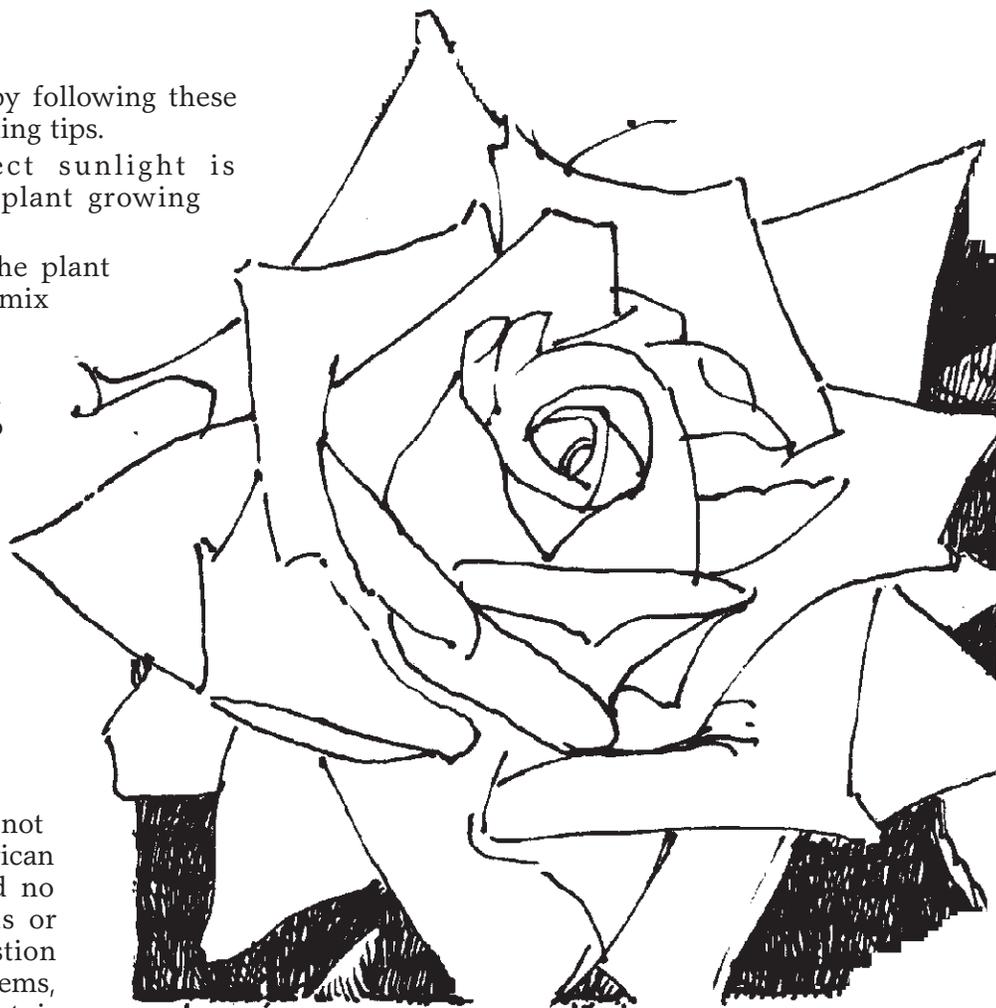
**Bloom Season.** Fresh-cut roses are available all year long, with February and December two of the largest selling months. Valentine's Day is the largest selling day of fresh-cut roses, with Christmas as second.

**Flower Color.** Yellow, pink, peach, white, lavender, multi-colored, and red.

### Varieties Or Cultivars.

*Red cultivars* (60 percent of rose production): Cara Mia, Royalty.

*Yellow cultivars:* Golden Fantasy, Golden Emblem.



*Pink cultivars:* Pink Sensation, Sonia.

*White cultivars:* Bridal White, White Butterfly.

**Foliage.** The waxy, deep green leaf is pinnately compound (3 to 5 leaflets on a central stem).

**Flowers.** The fresh-cut rose grows as a solitary flower at the end of a thorny stem, although floribunda roses are now sold in clusters and are the exception to the solitary flower. Rose petals form a cup. The length of the fresh-cut rose is usually 12 to 36 inches long, depending on the grade of the rose.

**History.** Most roses sold commercially as fresh-cut flowers are hybrids—usually tea hybrids. The common tea hybrid was discovered in China well before 1800. The colors of the rose are symbolic of different emotions or conditions: love (red), friendship or innocence (white), perfect love and happiness (pink), and infidelity (yellow).

**Flower Selection.** Check the following list when choosing a rose:

- Straight stems.
- Partially opened flowers or buds showing color.

- Ability to support the bloom without the use of wire.

- Absence of disease or insect problems—disfigured or discolored new as well as established growth (shriveled or yellowed leaves), or damaged stems, leaves, or flowers.

**Flower Care.** After purchasing your roses, you can take several steps to extend the enjoyment of your flowers. While all flowers and plants have a limited life, by following these care and handling tips you can extend the enjoyment of your roses 7 to 10 days in total.

- When you arrive home, select your vase and mix the fresh flower food with a measured amount of warm water in the vase. Most packages of floral food should be dissolved in 8 ounces (1 cup) of water. Be sure to read the floral food label and follow the directions. Use more than one package of floral food if the vase is large. Measuring the proper amount of water is very important.

- Use warm water, not hot or cold water. Warm water will speed up the flower's ability to absorb the water and floral food. It should be comfortable to your touch, not too hot or too cold.

- Recut the rose stems under water before you arrange them in the vase. Whether you make a straight cut or cut the stem on a slant does not matter as much as cutting the stem under water. Submerge the bottom 3 inches of the stem (not the entire rose!). Cut 1 to 2 inches off the bottom of the stem with a sharp knife or shears. Arrange the rose in a vase or other container with floral food and warm water.

- The floral food and warm water should last for several days. But, roses require a lot of water, so replace the floral food and water solution as the roses use it.

If you are cutting your own roses, there are some extra steps you may take to extend the enjoyment of your flowers.

- Cut flowers early in the morning or in the late afternoon.

- Immediately place the stem in a bucket of warm water.

- Recut the stems and put them in a solution of floral food and water for an hour before arranging them.

- Follow the tips above to prepare and arrange your roses.

Your roses will not reflower, so discard them when the blooms are gone.

## Common Name. fresh-cut daffodil

**Scientific Name.** *Narcissus* spp.

**Bloom Season.** Early to mid-spring, with Easter and Mother's Day the two largest selling days.

**Flower Color.** The cup (corola) part of the flower is yellow or white, and the saucer (perianth) part of the flower is yellow, white, orange, orange/red, pink, green, and apricot.

**Varieties Or Cultivars.** Simplex is a very fragrant daffodil. White Lion, Texas, and White Marvel are three large, flowering daffodils.

**Foliage.** Leaves are light green and come up around the base of the stalk. The size of the leaf is generally  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch by 15 inches.

**Flowers.** The flower has a cup and saucer shape. Many daffodils are fragrant.

**History.** In Greek mythology, Narcissus is a name that honors a beautiful child who was so awestruck by his appearance that the gods turned him into a flower.

**Flower Selection.** Check the following list when choosing daffodils.

- Buds are showing color but not fully open.
- There are no flattened or torn petals.
- Stems should not be supported by wires; they should be able to stand on their own.
- The plant has no disease or insect problems.

**Flower Care.** After purchasing your daffodils, you need to take several steps to enjoy your flowers longer.

- When you arrive home, select your vase and mix the fresh flower food with a measured amount of warm water in the vase. Most packages of floral food should be dissolved in 8 ounces (1 cup) of water. Be sure to read the floral food label and follow the directions. Use more than one package of floral food if the vase is large. Measuring the proper amount of water is very important.

- Use warm water, not hot or cold water. Warm water will speed up the flower's ability to absorb the water and floral food.

- Recut the stems under water before you arrange them in the vase. Whether you make a straight cut or cut the stem on a slant does not matter as much as cutting the stem under water. Submerge the bottom 3 inches of the stem (not the entire daffodil!). Cut 1 to 2 inches off the bottom of the stem with a sharp knife or shears. Arrange

the flower in a vase or other container with floral food and warm water.

- The floral food and warm water should last for several days. Replace the solution as the flowers use it.

If you are cutting your own daffodils, there are some extra steps that you need to take to extend the enjoyment of your flowers.

- Cut flowers early in the morning or in the late afternoon.

- Immediately place the stem in a bucket of warm water.

- Recut the stems and put them in a solution of floral food and water for an hour before arranging them. Do not condition them during this time with other flowers. It is best to condition daffodils by themselves prior to arranging them.



- Arrange daffodils alone or with other flowers in a vase or other container with measured warm water and floral food.

Your daffodils will not reflower, so discard them when the blooms are gone.

**Usage.** Daffodils are a nice addition to a fresh-flower arrangement. While their life is limited, you can extend the enjoyment of the flowers using fresh-flower food. You should expect up to a week of enjoyment from your daffodils.



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**For more information**, call your county Extension office. Look in your telephone directory under your county's name to find the number.

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