Preparing Cut Flowers for Show

June 15, 2016

Rick Heaslip

Publication 34:

*Preparation of plant material* begins at the time flowers and foliage are cut from the garden. The ideal time for cutting is early in the morning or late in the day.

***Hardening*** means placing plant material in a deep wide-mouthed bucket in deep warm (or cool) water and keeping it there, preferably **overnight.** Stems should be cut on the slant for better water intake, and all foliage should be removed from the lower half of flower stems. During the hardening process keep material in a cool, dark, humid, draft-free place.

Some cut flowers and some kinds of foliage and woody material do not readily absorb water and these require ***conditioning.*** Different plants respond to different treatment, such as: splitting stem ends, scraping away the thick outer covering of cut ends of branches, burning stem ends, placing stem ends in boiling water, use of certain chemicals, submerging foliage. This is done **first** and then the hardening procedure follows.

Hints:

-take a water-filled pail with you (sometimes keep one in the car with you, and scissors, when you go for a drive!)

-the middle of the afternoon is the poorest time to cut, unless the weather is cool, rainy, or cloudy.

-if a long soak time, remove all foliage that would rest below the water.

-allow clean water to reach halfway up the stem ( some need to be soaked to their necks)

-if material is in a design, put finished designs in cool place until ready to display

-may spray with cool mist, and check water levels

-use clean receptacles - bucket, container, etc. to prevent development of bacteria

-don't dunk flowers and foliage that would be damaged by submergence, as lamb's-ears, pansies, etc.

# Conditioning & Hardening, Page 2

Foliage and Woody Branches:

-the structure of plant determines resistance to wilting

-all leaves last better if given a long drink of water, **but** some kinds transpire so quickly that unless water is supplied *immediately* after cutting, they go limp at once.

-some plants from hot climates, like bird-of-paradise and ti, have self-protection against fast transpiration

-plants with large leaf surfaces need special attention: hosta, calla-lily, castor bean, begonia, ligularia, horseradish, and others need to have the whole leaf submerged in cool water for several hours or overnight to allow the foliage to become crisp and firm

-aspidastra, ivy, monstera, sanseviera and yucca, tolerate lack of moisture and only the stems need be steeped for several hours or overnight

-needles and broadleaf evergreen branches transpire slowly with little loss of moisture, but they benefit if stems are soaked.

-dessication can be further retarded if a tablespoon of glycerine is added to each quart of water; this treatment also helps prevent freezing of evergreens in outdoor decorations

-to prepare woody branches or tough stems for better absorption, make 2-inch or deeper crosscuts into the base of stems or hammer lightly; make shorter cuts for shorter stems

-when trees and shrubs are being used primarily for foliage, don't remove below-water leaves that might be useful, but do pick off defective leaves

-for foliage material, water need not be as deep for flowers but soaking time is the same, or may be cut a day ahead

# Conditioning & Hardening, Page 3

**Conditioning and Hardening of Show Material**

1. Watering your flower beds and borders at ground level the day before you start cutting would be beneficial for the condition of the cut flowers.

2. Rinse your flower containers and buckets out with a solution of javex water.

3. When cutting, carry a container of warm water with you and plunge the stems into the water immediately. Water temperature in containers should be a bit above blood temperature.

4. Cutting in late afternoon is best, during the last hours of daylight. This is when the food content is at its peak. Or, cut very early before the dew has dried on the petals. If flower entries have to be in Thursday, most material could be cut Wednesday morning, and then arranged Wednesday afternoon and evening. Foliage for designs could be cut even earlier on Tuesday evening.

5. Flowers for design should be gathered in the advanced bud or nearly mature bud stage. At the tight bud stage, they will not keep well or continue to open.

6. Use a short, sharp knife and cut on a slant as more plant cells are then exposed to water intake.

7. After being brought into the house, stems should be recut under water to prevent formation of air bubbles.

8. Let faucet water stand about ten minutes so air bubbles can escape before placing stems in it.

9. If stems are woody, split before conditioning or smash with hammer. Before arranging, recut stems underwater.

10. Stems which ooze white sap should be burnt or held in scalding water for a few seconds (protect flower head) before placing in water to harden.

11. Never let water touch flower petals as it may spot them, especially delicate fleshy petals.

12. Set containers in a cool, dark room for 6 to 8 hours, preferably overnight. They would benefit from a misting of cold water in the air around them.

13. Exception to the warm water conditioning is baby's breath, bachelor's button and cosmos. Condition overnight in cold water.

# Conditioning & Hardening, Page 4

## Tips on Cutting and Preparing Selected Plant Materials

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Flower | When To Cut | How To Treat |
| Anemone | ½ to fully open | Scrape stems |
| Aster | ¾ to fully open | Scrape stems; break from plants; may boil ends |
| Astilbe | Fully open | Crush stems; harden overnight in 1 cap mouthwash, 3 gal. Water |
| Azalea | Bud to fully open | Scrape and crush stems |
| Bachelor Button | ½ to fully open | Deep cold water |
| Calendula | Fully open | Scrape stems |
| Carnation | ½ to fully open | Cut stems under water below node; scrape stems; stand in 1/8 tsp. Boric acid, 1 qt. Water for 2-4 hrs.; harden in clear water |
| Canna | ½ to fully open | Scrape stems |
| Celosia |  | Shallow water |
| Chrysanthemum | Fully open | Break off and scrape stems or crush; deep water |
| Clematis | ¾ to fully open | May submerge flowers for 1 hr. |
| Cosmos | Fully open | Scrape stems; up to necks in icy cold water |
| Dahlia | Fully open | Sear stems in flame; boil; split stems; cool water; may fill hollow stems |
| Daisy | ½ to fully open | Scrape stems or sear in flame |
| Daylily | ¾ to fully open; cut night before in bud form or just opening | Flowers last one day; harden in clear water |
| Delphinium | Lower part fully open | Scrape stems; invert; fill stem with 1 Tbsp alcohol per pt warm water; harden in same |
| Foxglove | Lower part fully open | Harden in 1 Tbsp alcohol in 1 pt warm water |
| Geranium | Fully open | Scrape stems |
| Gerbera | ¾ to fully open | Sear stems in flame or boil; deep cool water |
| Gladiolus | As lower 1/3 opens | Scrape stems; may cut early and lay on cool dark floor |
| Heliotrope | ¾ to fully open | Sear stems in flame |
| Hollyhock | ¾ to fully open | Scrape stems or float florets |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Hydrangea | Fully open | Sear stems in flame; or split stems; need long hardening |
| Larkspur | ¾ to fully open | Scrape stems |
| Lily | Cut when flower fully open | Scrape or split stem ends; harden in 1 Tbsp alcohol to 1 pt water |
| Marigold | Fully open | Scrape stems; deep water |
| Morning Glory | In evening when closed | Wrap each bud in soft paper; sear vine stem; let stand in deep water overnight |
| Nasturtium | ½ to fully open |  |
| Phlox | Fully open | Scrape or split stems; harden in 2 qt hot water, ¼ c sugar, ½ tsp bleach |
| Poppy | Night before opening | Sear ends 30 – 45 sec; rub ends with salt; harden in deep water 10 hours |
| Queen Anne’s Lace | Fully open | Singe stem ends to prevent shedding; deep cool water |
| Rose | As second petal unfurls | Cut stem just above a 5-petal leaf; scrape or split stem; may try boiling stem ends to revive |
| Snapdragon | ¾ to fully open | Scrape stems |
| Stock | ¾ to fully open | Scrape stems |
| Sweet Pea | ¾ to fully open | Snap stem from vine |
| Zinnia | Fully open | Sear stems in flame; try immersing heads in water 15 minutes; dipping ends in boiling water 15 seconds then sear; leave overnight in warm water |

**Show Business**

(Hints for Exhibitors!)

1. Read over your show schedule and rules very carefully!

2. All judging of competition classes will be based on standards included in OHA Publication, "Ontario Judging and Exhibiting Standards". It is suggested that all competitors obtain copies from the Society Secretary, Bonnie Warner.

3. When a class indicates a specified number of a certain variety, the exhibit must contain that exact number. Remember, any bud showing colour is considered a bloom. Count your blossoms! Single bloom specimens should be disbudded.

4. In design classes only, greenery and flower material need not be grown by the exhibitor.

5. Remember to measure exhibits to ensure that they meet size requirements where specified.

6. All specimen flowers should be displayed with their own foliage. Attached foliage, whenever possible, will rate higher than unattached foliage.

7. Uniformity is an important part of the exhibits where more than one specimen is required in a class. It is easy to gain points by trimming stems to the same length and to have specimens of similar size and shape.

8. It is not always the largest specimen that wins, but the most perfect.

9. Exhibitors are encouraged to seek assistance from Show Committee members regarding correct placement of entries in classes.

10. Specimens display better when the length of the stem is in proportion to the flower head;

i.e. do not display just the heads of marigolds with little or no stem!

11. Be careful of the age or maturity of blooms; i.e. roses should only be 1/2 to 3/4 open, not fully "blown".

12. Groom your exhibits carefully! Show in clean containers, baskets or pots. Remove dirt, dead leaves and flowers.

13. Avoid overcrowding your specimens in too small a container, or showing small material in too large a container.

14. Be kind in your criticism of the judges. Their task is not an easy one. Without judges, we would not have competitive shows!

15. When viewing other people's exhibits, please do not touch! If decorative design units have to be moved, only the Show Committee members or the exhibitor should do so.