

Cut garden flowers in the early morning, when stems are cool and flowers have had time to take up water overnight. If morning is not possible, choose a cool evening and avoid cutting during the heat of the day.

Choose a cool time of day

Flowers lose water through their leaves and petals. In hot sun, that loss can outpace the water reaching the stems, so freshly cut flowers may wilt before you bring them indoors. Morning is a useful choice because the garden is usually cooler and you can put the stems straight into water.

Bring a clean bucket partly filled with water to the garden. Keep it in the shade while you work, and place each stem in it soon after cutting. On a hot day, do not leave the bucket sitting in the sun.

Look at the bloom stage

The best stage depends on the flower. Some flowers continue opening after they are cut, while others look their best only if they open on the plant.

Cut roses when the buds show color and the outer petals have begun to loosen. Cut daffodils when the buds are colored and beginning to open. For zinnias, wait until the flowers are open and the stems feel firm just below the flower head.

For flowers growing along a spike, such as snapdragons, cut when several lower flowers are open and the upper buds show color. If you are unsure about a variety, cut a few stems at different stages and note which ones open well in your vase.

How to cut the stems

1. Clean your cutting tools and bucket before you start.
2. Choose healthy stems without damaged petals or signs of disease.
3. Cut stems long enough for the vase, using sharp scissors or garden snips.
4. Remove leaves that would sit below the water in the bucket or vase.
5. Put the stems into water promptly and carry them indoors out of direct sun.

Leave enough foliage on the plant for continued growth. Avoid taking every stem from a small or newly established plant.

Give flowers time to drink

Before arranging, let the cut stems stand in water in a cool place for a few hours. Use a clean vase, and trim the stems again to fit it. Keep the finished arrangement away from direct sun and heat sources.

Check the water daily and top it up as needed. Change cloudy water, rinse the vase, and remove any leaves or petals that have fallen into it.

Common questions about cutting flowers

Can I cut flowers after rain?

Yes. Handle wet petals gently, since they can bruise, and avoid collecting stems with damaged or decaying blooms.

Can I cut flowers at midday?

You can, but heat and direct sun increase the chance of wilting. Take water with you and move the stems into a cool place promptly.

Will every bud open in a vase?

No. Some buds cut too early will not open well, and some flowers should be cut when already open. Use the bloom stage as your guide.

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