



Arrange Flowers Like a Professional

MAKE A BIG SPLASH ON A SMALL BUDGET AT YOUR OWN KITCHEN SINK

WRITTEN BY ROBYN ROEHM CANNON

Who doesn't love a beautiful bouquet to brighten a room or a dinner table? If you're like me, you want flowers everywhere in your house but sometimes hesitate to purchase them because of their perceived expense or lasting power.

We need to rethink that strategy, says Dale Rohman, a florist with more than 40 years of experience in decorating some of the finest homes in the nation. Although Rohman's clients include many of the most important corporations and organizations in the United States, his first love is teaching people how to create bouquets with flowers picked from their own garden or purchased inexpensively at the grocery store, using supplies found in most home pantries.

In addition to demonstrations at home, at garden shows across the country, and at occasional appearances on Home & Garden Television (HGTV), the Discovery Channel, and NBC's *Today*, Rohman—America's Flower Man™—is an author. His *Top Tips for the Kitchen Sink Florist* reveals closely held secrets of the floral profession to anyone interested in making affordable and creative arrangements.

"The industry has changed so much in the past decade," he commented from his office in St. Louis, Missouri. "Open trade has made flowers from all over the world readily available to people at a reasonable cost. When I started my design business 40 years ago, there were red, white, pink, and yellow roses. Now, roses as well as so many other flowers can be purchased in such a wide variety of colors—and they aren't being dyed like they used to be—hybridizers are growing them that way."

Flowers shouldn't be saved only for special occasions, Rohman continues. "I blame the floral industry for conditioning people to think that only events like baptisms, weddings, and funerals are worth the expense of flowers," he says. "We need to adopt the European philosophy of bringing flowers into our homes to brighten our everyday lives. They add so much color and graciousness to any room, and a few hand-arranged blooms can have enormous impact."

Don't think you can't do it, either. "The first thing most people need to get over is the idea that they 'just aren't creative,'" says Rohman. "I hear that all the time, and it is simply not true."

If you and I took the same flowers, we'd both come up with completely different arrangements. That's the joy of working with flowers—everyone's interpretation is totally unique, and they're all good."

One thing that often discourages people from purchasing flowers is the disappointment when flowers don't last, Rohman comments. "But you can avoid that by understanding which flowers are long-lived and which should be enjoyed for just a short time," he says.

Spring flowers like tulips or jonquils are very fragile—but are inexpensive when in season, so buy a huge bunch, arrange them casually, and don't be surprised when they are past their prime in three or four days. But if Aunt Belle is coming to stay for a week and you want the bouquet in her room to remain fresh, choose a bunch of alstromerias, rubrum lilies, gerbera daisies, or even carnations. Properly cared for, these hearty varieties can last up to two weeks.

The kitchen sink is an ideal place to work, because you have easy access to water, a cupboard for containers and supplies, and a drawer for your tools. While there's no right or wrong way to arrange flowers, there are plenty of tips in Rohman's book that make the result more professional. Here are some that I've found most useful:

- Make an easy flower preservative by adding ½ teaspoon sugar and ½ teaspoon bleach to every 1¼ cups of water. Sugar feeds the flowers, and bleach keeps the water clear—especially important when using glass containers for your bouquets. Add a dash of clear soda (such as 7UP) when arranging jonquils to make them last longer.
- Tulips continue to grow after being cut. To stabilize them in your bouquet, add gin or vodka—1 tablespoon for every 3 cups of water. They'll perk up immediately!
- Collect plastic tubs from butter, ice cream, yogurt, etc. These make excellent liners for wicker or silver containers, which may not take well to florist's foam or water.
- The shorter the stem, the longer the flower will last. An elegant compact rose bouquet in a silver julep cup will last much longer than a dozen long-stem blooms.
- Remove any foliage that will fall below the water line in a container to keep the water from souring. Arrange your flowers in ice water—including the cubes! Flowers draw cold water slower, which will make them last longer. Trim stems and change water every other day to add life to your blooms.
- To prevent an arrangement from wilting prematurely, keep it out of direct light, direct heat, or air conditioning.

- When cutting flowers from your own garden, bring a pail of warm water and submerge the blooms immediately after cutting.
- To condition hydrangeas, submerge them head-down in a bowl of cool water for an hour. Drip-dry, cut the stems at a 45 degree angle, and place them in a bucket of warm water overnight. These dramatic blooms will last for weeks, and as the water evaporates, they will dry perfectly for enjoyment throughout the fall and winter.

There are more tips, "green" advice, and recipes for good floral design in *Top Tips for the Kitchen Sink Florist*, available at www.dalerothman.com. But perhaps Rohman's best advice actually came from Hans Christian Andersen: "*Just living is not enough. One must have sunshine, freedom, and a little flower.*" ■

