

# Gardening in the Zone<sup>®</sup>

with Iowa Gardening Magazine's Liz Gilman



*James Romer gives us tips for showing flowers.*

## Flower Judging

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It's State Fair time so this week we're going to talk about getting your flowers ready for judging... even if that judge is just yourself. James Romer, Iowa Master Gardener Coordinator at Iowa State University, offers some suggestions on showing flowers.

According to Romer, the first thing you need to think about is the water. Romer likes to fill the containers that he uses to transport flowers to shows with water the day before he cuts the blooms. Then he leaves them outside in the sun to heat the water up and reduce the possibility of putting a warm stem in cold water. You don't want to shock the flower.

Also, the time of day you cut your flowers is important. You should cut them in the early morning before 9:00 a.m. or early evening after 6:00 p.m. Use a clean, sharp knife and always cut the stem several inches longer than necessary because further trimming may be needed. Romer advises that the tools you use are important. Be careful if you use scissors because they tend to pinch the ends of the stems, closing the water-conducting vessels to the flowers. A bypass pruner or a knife is a better option for creating a clean cut and not compromising the integrity of the stem. Also, remove the leaves from the portion of the stem that will be in water. Foliage covered with water will rot and cause discolored water. Then after placing the freshly cut flowers in your day-old water, you will want to move them to a cool location like a refrigerator for three to twelve hours to condition or harden them. This promotes the quick water uptake necessary for long flower life.

Romer reminds us that showing a flower is no different from exhibiting a steer at the fair. You'll want to groom it to make sure it looks its best for the judge. Stems should be re-cut just prior to exhibiting in order to open up new vessels for water. Floral preservatives can be added to the water to extend the vase life of cut flowers. You'll want to keep vases simple so they don't detract from the beauty of the flower. Finally, remove the dirt and spray residue as well as any dead foliage or flowers.

Then you can be the judge and declare your flowers "best of show" even if they are just displayed on your own kitchen table.

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