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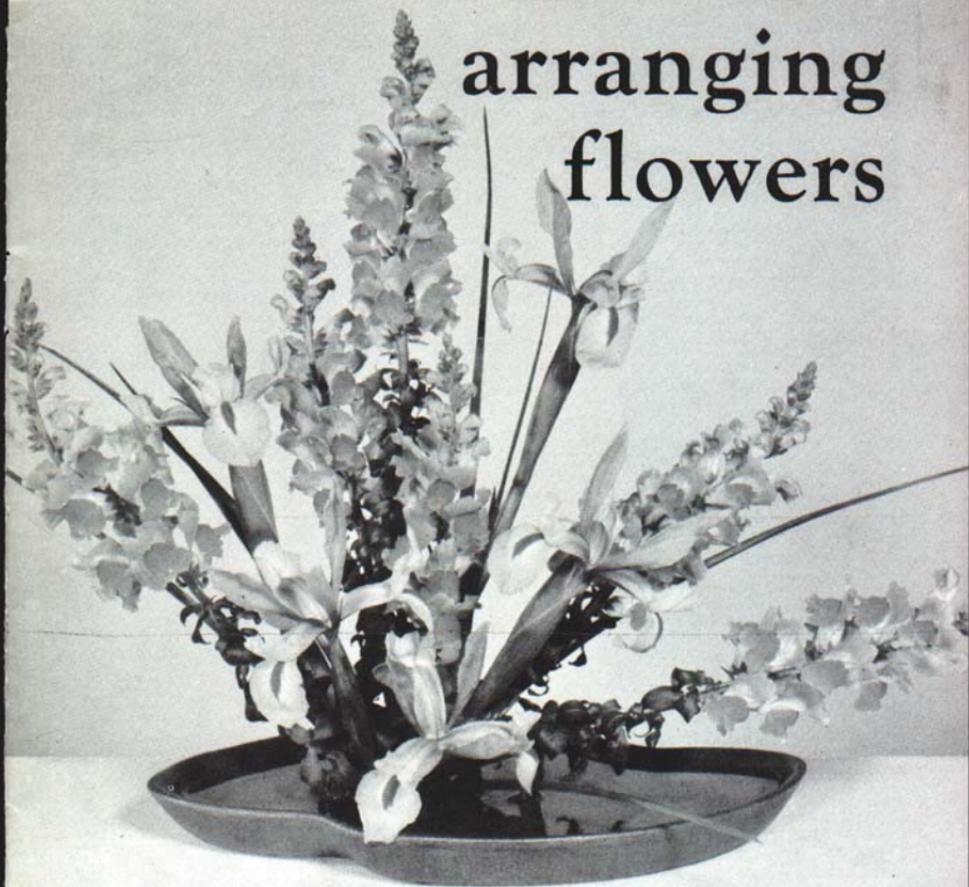
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Arranging Flowers  
Michigan State University Extension Service  
Elwood W. Kalin, State College of Washington  
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# arranging flowers



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MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY  
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East Lansing

## Follow these steps in making a flower arrangement:

1. Consider the occasion.
2. Have a clear mental picture of the type of arrangement you want to make.
3. Gather and condition the flowers and foliages.
4. Select the right container, flower holder and any other equipment you need.
5. Arrange the flowers.  
Follow basic principles of design.  
Choose an appropriate color combination.  
  
Take plenty of time to finish the arrangement.
6. Put your arrangement in a cool place until needed.

Cover: Triangular design with naturalistic balance. Yellow snapdragons are used as spike type flowers. The Wedgewood iris complete the arrangement as button type flowers.

This publication was prepared by Elwood W. Kalin, Associate Professor of Floriculture, State College of Washington. It is a reprint of Pacific Northwest Bulletin 13.

## *flower arranging is an art*

LIKE the other arts, flower arranging is based on natural forms. Nature designs and colors the flowers; you select the flowers and design the arrangement. You need to follow basic art principles of design when you put flowers in a container to make an arrangement.

You may have natural talent for arranging flowers, but a few basic principles of design and color will help you. And, like other artists, you must be willing to practice.

Even if you practice faithfully, don't expect all your arrangements to be masterpieces. When you have flowers in the garden, make one or more arrangements every day. Get acquainted with your flowers and learn the types of arrangements for which they are best suited.

## *know your flowers*

AS YOU gather flowers and foliages, try to get a combination of spike (steeple) and button (round) types. There are three main kinds of flowers:

1. *Spikes*—have a narrow, straight look and pointed tip: gladiolus, snapdragons, stocks, delphiniums, rose buds, iris leaves and grain heads. Put spikes in the arrangement first to form the outline.
2. *Buttons*—round or roundish looking: zinnias, marigolds, open roses, petunias, carnations and chrysanthemums. Put buttons in the arrangement last so they break the space into interesting patterns. They may add accent and a point of focus that draws the eye of the viewer.
3. *Background flowers*—have fine texture and irregular outline that add lightness and airiness to the arrangement: baby's breath, perennial statice, stevia, asparagus fern and love-in-a-mist. Background flowers may be used if available, but they are not as essential as the spikes and buttons. Put these background flowers in the arrangement after the spikes and before the buttons.

## *forms and balance for arrangements*

You use the lines and kinds of balance found in drawings, paintings and sculpture in planning the basic shape of your arrangement. Because lines form the skeleton of the arrangement, they are even more important than color and mass. Lines may show strength and vitality or gentleness and delicacy. Lines can produce a rhythmic quality in a flower arrangement and give a feeling of motion. The way lines are arranged creates balance.

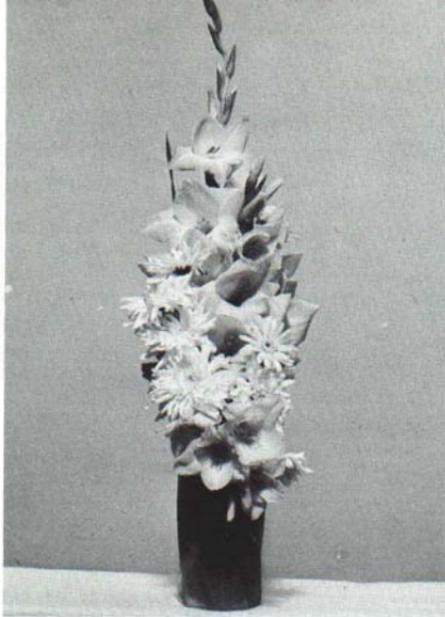
Most arrangements come under four main types: 1. Vertical, 2. Horizontal, 3. Triangular, and 4. Radial. We sometimes hear of other form such as ovals, diagonals, crescents and Hogarth curves, but these and other forms are slight variations of the four main types.



**VERTICAL LINES** are the most natural to use because most flowers and plants grow vertically. These lines suggest growth and vigor. Putting the main blossom in the center of the container gives vertical feeling. The arrangement may be like an exclamation point demanding attention or it may have gentle curves expressing dignity.



**HORIZONTAL LINES** are popular for use in table centerpieces and arrangements on coffee tables, mantels or wherever the background demands a long, low arrangement. Horizontal arrangements may decorate church altars. These arrangements have a restful effect. Spike flowers emphasize the horizontal effect and round flowers create the focal point and fill in around the spikes.



Verticle line arrangement of gladiolus and chrysanthemums in a modern verticle container.

Tilted horizontal line arrangement of callas, passion flower vine and calla foliage in a low container for a church altar.



ARRANGEMENT BY ELWOOD W. KALIN

**TRIANGULAR DESIGNS** are a combination of horizontal and vertical lines to give a "two-line" composition. See cover illustration.



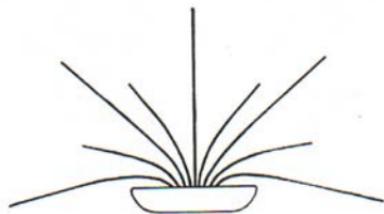
*Conventional balance:* When the vertical line comes up from the center of the horizontal line, a triangle is formed. Visual lines from the tip of the vertical to the tips of the horizontal line make this triangle. The triangle is the same on each side of the vertical line. It has *conventional balance*. This type of balance is also called formal or symmetrical balance.

Putting a spike flower along the vertical line and two spikes along the horizontal line forms the skeleton or frame of the design. When you want a tall, narrow triangle, shorten the horizontal line to give a short base. Shortening the vertical line and widening the horizontal one makes a low, flat triangle.

The triangular design fits many places and can be made to be seen from all sides or just from the front.



*Naturalistic balance,* another "two-line" form, uses a vertical line that is not put in the center of the horizontal line. The triangle is not the same on both sides of the vertical line. Naturalistic balance is often more interesting than conventional balance. You may be more imaginative and also leave something for the imagination of the viewer. Often, with only a few flowers, you can create a pleasant effect. This is also called informal or asymmetrical balance.



**RADIAL LINES** in flower arrangements form part of a circle. Arrangements with radial lines are often placed in globe-shaped containers. The design forms a full circle or part of a circle that holds the motion of the eye within the design. The construction is like a wheel with the spokes made by spike-type blooms. The focal point is the hub of the wheel. Round flowers give contrast and create interest within the design. This design has conventional balance.



ARRANGEMENT BY DOROTHY L. FRANKLIN

Conventional balance in a triangular arrangement of red roses and a few sprays of cedar in a bowl.

Naturalistic, triangular arrangement of single-type chrysanthemums and salal (lemon leaf) foliage in a pillow vase.



ARRANGEMENT BY MRS. JAMES KNOTT

Radial arrangement of gladiolus and roses in a shallow, round pottery container.



ARRANGEMENT BY ELWOOD W. KALIN



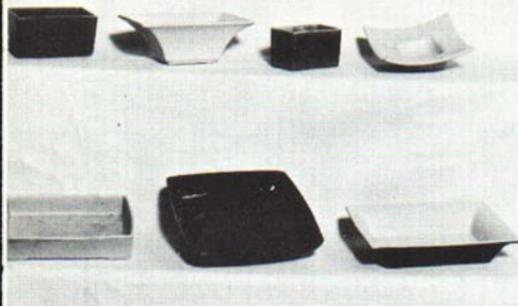
Vases (left) for verticle arrangements (top), period and modern designs (middle row) and tall, spreading arrangements (bottom). Bowls (center) suited for low designs.

## *selecting containers for cut flowers and flower*

Select containers for cut flowers with the same care you use in selecting the flowers. The lines of the container influence the lines of the arrangement. Except for arrangements to go with period settings, the container is usually less important than the flowers.

1. **SIZE.** Use containers large enough to hold the flowers without crowding the stems and deep enough to hold plenty of water.
2. **SHAPE.** Choose containers that have simple outlines and good proportions. They should stand firmly without tipping. The shapes of the flowers and foliage often help in choosing a container with the proper lines.
3. **TEXTURE.** Use light, fragile and smooth-textured containers for small, delicate flowers. Choose bold, sturdy and heavy appearing containers for large, coarse flowers.
4. **COLOR.** Plain glass, copper, burnished silver or neutral-colored containers are always suitable. If you use a colored container, choose one with subdued color and dull finish. The color should be the same as the flowers or a complementary or contrasting color.

Floral clay is a special type of putty used to fasten the flower holder to the bottom of a bowl to prevent tipping. To be certain the clay does its job, make sure the container, frog and clay are all dry.



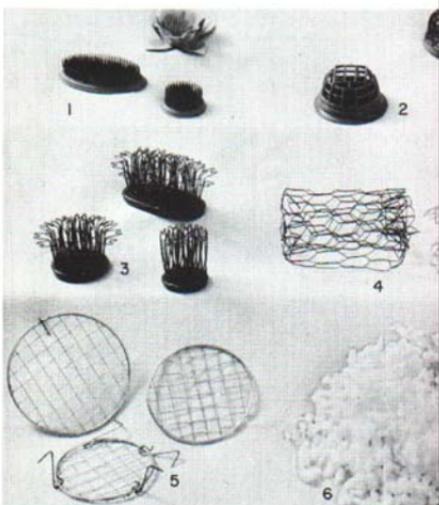
Rectangular and square bowls for low and angular types of designs.

## *holders (frogs)*

Many types of flower holders, usually called frogs, are available. When you buy, look for flower holders that—

- Hold flowers rigidly at the needed angles with minimum injury to the stems.
- Weigh enough to keep from tipping when holding heavy flowers.
- Adapt for holding both large and small stems.
- Resist rust and do not discolor water.

1. *Needlepoint Holder*—series of needlepoints set in a heavy metallic base. Difficult to put flowers in at an extreme angle, particularly flowers with hollow stems. Available in many sizes and shapes. 2. *"Bird-cage" holder*—made of lead alloy mesh put on a ring with cross meshing. Heavy and often used for table centerpieces. Flowers may be put into it from several angles, but not always at an exact angle. 3. *Hairpin holder*—series of brass wires shaped like hairpins and set into a lead base. Excellent for bowl arrangements. Has all the good qualities for flower holders. 4. *Chicken wire*—may serve as a holder for vase and basket arrangements. May be purchased at any hardware store. 5. *Flower Grills*—serve about the same as chicken wire. 6. *Plastic foam*—porous plastic material that will not absorb water. Packed into the vase to hold flowers in position. Most florists or variety stores can supply this foam.



## *color in flower arrangements*

Here are some terms you will want to know as you learn about color.

*Hue*—The quality or difference between one color and another, as red and yellow.

*Value*—The difference between a light color and a dark one. Value depends on the amount of black or white in a color.

*Intensity*—The grayness or brightness of a color. For example, emeralds and grapes both are green, but emeralds are a stronger green due to the clearness or lack of gray in them.

*Primary colors*—The three primary colors are red, yellow and blue. They are called primary because all the other colors are made by mixing these three colors in various proportions.

*Secondary colors*—If two primary colors are mixed in equal amounts, a different color will result. This new color is called a secondary color. The three secondary colors are orange, violet and green. The three primary and the three secondary colors together are usually called the six standard colors.

*Intermediate colors*—When a primary and a secondary color are mixed in equal proportions, an intermediate color results. The six intermediate colors are blue-green, blue-violet, red-violet, red-orange, yellow-orange and yellow-green.

### Color Dimensions

*Warm colors*—Colors mainly red or yellow in their make-up are called warm colors. Examples are red-orange, orange and yellow-orange.

*Cool colors*—Colors that are mostly green, blue and violet are called cool colors. Examples are blue-green, blue and blue-violet.

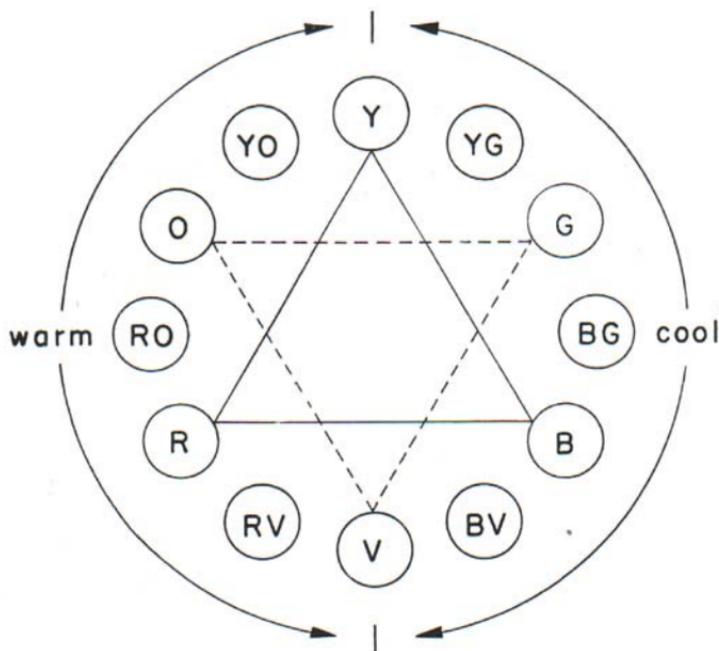
*Neutral colors*—Black, white and gray are called neutrals. Mixed with colors, they dilute or dull; but when neutrals are put near other colors they make those colors seem brighter by contrast.

### Color Harmonies

Harmonies of related colors are:

*One-hue harmony*—The use of one color with different values and intensities, such as dark blue and light blue. These are always safe color combinations to use.

*Analogous harmony*—Combination of colors that lie near each other around the color wheel. For example, orange, yellow-orange and yellow may be used together safely.



#### Harmonies and contrasting colors are:

*Complementary harmony*—The combination of colors that lie directly opposite each other on the color wheel (see drawing above); for example, yellow and violet, blue and orange, red and green. This is one of the most striking harmonies but must be used carefully, with each hue in the right amount.

*Double complementary harmony*—The use of two colors that come side by side on the color wheel and their complements. For example, violet and red-violet with their complements of yellow and yellow-green. This is a beautiful color combination if each color is used in the right amount. Use more of one color than the others.

*Split complementary harmony*—A combination of a color with the colors on either side of its complement. For example, violet with yellow-orange and yellow-green.

*Triads*—Colors which form equilateral triangles such as those drawn on the color chart make rich harmonies. For example, the combinations of violet, orange and green, or red, blue and yellow.

## *making the arrangement*

Behind each arrangement lies a basic idea of what you want to create. Also consider the occasion, where the arrangement will be put, the season and kinds of flowers available.

When you have decided the design for your arrangement make an effort to limit the different kinds of flowers and/or foliage to be used. It is often better to use only three or four kinds rather than more.

After you select a container, fill it with cool, clean water. Carefully select each flower or flower cluster for color, stem length, size and suitability so that when you put them in position, they relate pleasingly and form an attractive design.

**COMPOSITION**—To make a pleasing flower arrangement you must have a definite and well-considered line pattern, balance in the distribution of elements and an interesting silhouette. This means you must group the various parts to make a picture that is related and complete. A flower arrangement that has good composition follows all of the elements of design.

**SCALE**—The proper relationship in size (proportion) of all materials used in the flower arrangement, the container and its location determine scale. The height of the arrangement varies with the kind of container. A general guide to follow is: the flowers and foliage should be  $1\frac{1}{2}$  times the height of an upright container, or  $1\frac{1}{2}$  times the average width of a low container.

The main stems should not cross, and try to keep other stems from crossing.

Avoid crowding the flowers. Overcrowding destroys the individuality of the flowers. Make them appear natural.

**BALANCE**—Balance gives a sense of ease. Balance in art is the result of comparing apparent weights, not actual weights. To produce the feeling of balance, the arrangement must be equally attractive on all sides. Balance is present in flower color, texture and shape or mass.

Dark or intense colors are heavy and pastel colors are light. Keep most dark colors at the base of the arrangement.

Coarse-textured flowers seem heavier than fine-textured flowers of the same color. Place coarse-textured blossoms low in the arrangement.

Shape or mass changes weight. A spike-type flower is lighter than a round-head or rose-type flower.

Generally the highest point of the arrangement should be over the center of the container.

**UNITY AND HARMONY**—Any art object must look unified. Every flower and stem should look as if it really belongs to the arrangement. Each unit of color, size, shape and texture should bear a close relation to the others and to the whole. In other words, each part must contribute to the total arrangement.

Flowers used in combinations should have something in common. Avoid using exotic or unusual flowers with common garden flowers.

Every arrangement should have one main color. You can use more than one or two colors in one arrangement, but good mixed bouquets are difficult to make.

The type of arrangement and the occasion you are making it for should harmonize. There should be a harmony between the flowers and the container in color, shape and texture, as well as in design.

Most of us notice lack of color harmony more than lack of texture or shape harmony. Both texture and shape harmony are important. When you select colors, follow the suggestions given on pages 10 and 11.

Don't forget that color extends from the actual arrangement to its immediate surroundings in the room. Harmonize the colors of the arrangement with the rug, draperies, curtains, furniture and walls.

**RHYTHM**—Rhythm is a quality we strive for in every arrangement. Rhythm is flowing movement in a design. The motion starts at the focal point and the viewer's eye is carried throughout the arrangement from one point of interest to another in natural and logical order. You can create rhythm by repeating shapes of the material. Use a series of the same flower in different sizes. Or actually make a line with accents of stems, leaves, twigs, flowers, color and texture. Large flowers, bright colors and definite forms give important accents.

**FOCUS**—We're usually attracted first to a single point in a good arrangement. This is called the focal point or center of interest. In flower arrangement the focal point may be blossoms, leaves, stems, or any other accents.

The focal point in a flower arrangement usually should be about one-third or less of the way up between the top of the container and the top of the arrangement. It should be at about the center of the width of arrangements and for naturalistic arrangements where the imaginary vertical and horizontal lines meet.

FINISH—Good design does not guarantee a successful or finished arrangement. You must also give some attention to the final details.

Use only quality materials. Flowers and foliages that are old, bruised or damaged detract from the arrangement.

The way the frog or holder is hidden also lends to the finish.

If the water surface in the bowl shows, keep it clean and free from little pieces of leaves, petals and other debris.

## *care and preparation of cut flowers*

1. Flowers keep best when cut with a *sharp knife* and put immediately in water. The cut should be clean and smooth, and at any convenient angle. You may use florists' shears, but not scissors.

The maturity of flowers affects their keeping quality. Roses, gladiolus, iris, poppies and peonies should be cut at bud stage, but flowers such as asters, dahlias, zinnias, marigolds, chrysanthemums and delphiniums should be well opened.

2. For best results, cut flowers in late afternoon or early evening when the plant is filled with stored food and flowers are most fragrant. Remove leaves that will be under water in the arrangement.

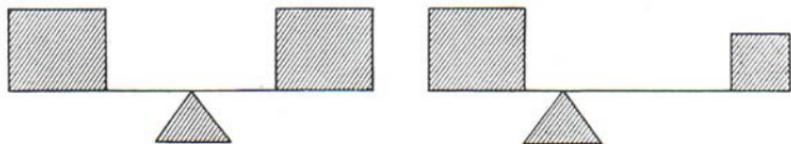
3. To condition flowers, place them in warm (100°-110° F.) water. Keep them for several hours in a dark room that is free from drafts and reasonably humid. Use deep, clean containers, washed with soap and water and perhaps rinsed in a chlorate disinfectant.

4. Treat poinsettias, poppies and dahlias by inserting the stem end in boiling water for 30 seconds, then into warm water as for other flowers.

Keep cut flowers in a cool room at night, and change the water daily. You may use a meat baster or a syringe to change the water without disturbing the arrangement. Commercial flower foods are satisfactory only for certain flowers; for instance, roses and carnations, and then only if the water is soft.

Never expose flowers to direct sunlight or drafts.

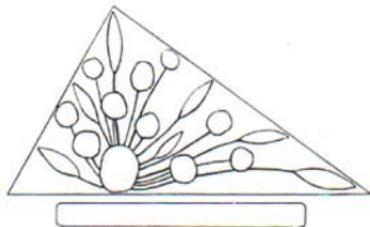
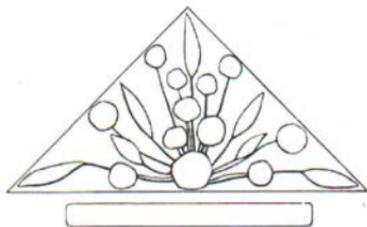
## *Balance in Flower Arrangements*



Conventional Balance  
or  
Formal Balance  
or  
Symmetrical Balance

vs.

Naturalistic Balance  
or  
Informal Balance  
or  
Asymmetrical Balance



# *arranging flowers*

balance	Principles of arranging flowers—what flowers to select and where and how to place them—are outlined in this extension bulletin. Sections on balance, color combination, and types of flowers will give you the fundamental background for creating artistic flower arrangements—arrangements that say you have given planning and thought resulting in a well-designed composition, not just dropped the flowers in the handiest vase. The bulletin's pointers on choosing a container and cutting and conditioning cut flowers will help you make the most of your flowers.
scale	
composition	
harmony	
unity	
rhythm	
focus	
finish	

## **A Pacific Northwest Cooperative Extension Publication**

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