

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



February 10, 2024

Use Plants and Flowers to Brighten Someone's Day

Studies have shown that plants and flowers brighten a person's day. Valentine's Day provides a fantastic opportunity to show appreciation to the important people in your life.

Many available plants provide a long period of enjoyment. The beautiful flowers of the *Phalaenopsis*, or moth orchid, last for several weeks to months. Do not cut the flower stalk back after blossoms fade. In a few months it may branch to form additional flowers, and new plants may develop on those stalks. In nature, orchids grow on trees, so they are grown and sold in pots with a bark-type potting mix. The orchid's white, fleshy roots grow into the coarse bark mix or out into the air around the pot. Water the plants thoroughly when the soil is light and dry. Make sure the water drains out of the pot and away from the roots. Place them in an area receiving medium light.

Anthurium, or flamingo flower, is another plant option with a colorful modified leaf called a spathe. A spadix, a stalk with densely packed flowers, is located in the middle of the spathe. The spathe color, depending on the cultivar, may be bright red, pink, salmon, or white. Bright indirect light is needed. Make sure the soil dries slightly to the touch before watering

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again. The anthurium is poisonous if any part of the plant is ingested. Keep it away from curious children and pets.

At Valentine's Day, bromeliads with red leaves are offered. The leaves form a rosette which turns into a large, water-holding cup in the center. The cup holds the plant's water supply, and the edges of the leaves are lined with small teeth. Some bromeliads may be blooming at the time of purchase. These plants only flower once, but the blooms and bracts last for a while. New plantlets or pups are produced to grow more plants after blooming. Bromeliads require moderate light to full sun for 3 to 4 hours daily. Only water them in the center of the leaves. More information about bromeliads is available at

<https://www.uky.edu/hort/sites/www.uky.edu/hort/files/documents/bromeliads.pdf>.

Traditional gifts for Valentine's Day are fresh-cut mixed flowers and roses. After receiving a beautiful floral arrangement, check the water level. Fill the container with warm water, preferably water containing a floral preservative. Most floral preservatives contain materials to acidify the water which discourages bacterial activity, kills bacteria found in the water and on the plant's stem, and reduces the rate of respiration or use of food, along with sugar to supply food to the flowers. Many commercial floral preservatives are available at the florist or where fresh flowers are sold. Use preservatives as directed with warm water.

Repeated scientific testing showed that putting aspirin in water with cut flowers does not prolong their life. In fact, the life of most cut flowers is shortened by using aspirin.

To help the arrangement last, place it somewhere cool. Keep the arrangement away from heat sources such as heaters, furnace vents, direct sunlight, and appliances. Place the flowers away from hot or cold drafts, especially from opening and closing doors.

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Occasionally, after a day or two, you may find a rose drooping with a bent stem. This is heartbreaking! Before giving up on the rose, try to revive it. Take it out of the arrangement and place it in a broad, shallow pan, sink, or bathtub with warm water, about 100 degrees F. While holding it under water to prevent air from getting into the water-conducting tissue of the stem, cut off one-half to one inch of stem from the end with a sharp knife or sharp shears. If an air bubble forms in the conducting tissue, the rose will not take up water and revive.

Then submerge the entire rose—flower, stem, and foliage—in a pan, sink, or bathtub of warm water. Once revived, which may take 20 minutes to an hour, place it back into the arrangement.

Enjoy roses long after Valentine's Day by drying them. After the flowers open but before the petals start falling, hang them upside down by the stem in a dark place with good air circulation to prevent the color from fading. The leaves can be removed or left. Mix other dried flowers or fillers with the roses to make a beautiful, dried bouquet.

Using flower petals in potpourri is another way of preservation. Scatter petals on a cookie sheet in an area with good air circulation and allow to dry. After the petals dry, place them in a glass container. This makes a nice keepsake to display for a long time.

For more information about houseplants and care of fresh flowers, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or at annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu.

Annette's Tip:

Other suggestions for Valentine's Day gifts include seed packets of flowers to grow in the garden or a gift certificate to a local nursery for spring bedding plants, perennials, or rose bush.

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Upcoming Meetings:

“The Basics: What to Consider When Planting Fruit Trees in the Backyard” will be presented at 1:00 and 6:00 p.m. on Monday, February 12 at the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Office. We will discuss required growing conditions, recommended fruit trees and varieties for Kentucky, and major diseases and insect pests.

“Pruning and Care of Fruit Trees in the Backyard” will be presented at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, February 17 at the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Office. Pruning fruit trees, managing disease and insect pests, and fruit thinning will be discussed.

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