


MESSENGER-INQUIRER

	University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food and Environment <i>Cooperative Extension Service</i>
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Flowers and Plants Brighten Valentine's Day

Beautiful flowers or plants brighten Valentine's Day! Many choices are available to show appreciation to the important people in your life.

Fresh-cut mixed flowers and roses are traditional gifts. After receiving a beautiful floral arrangement, check the water level in the container. Fill it with warm water or, preferably, with water containing a floral preservative. Most floral preservatives contain materials to acidify the water to discourage bacterial activity, to kill the bacteria found in the water and on the plant's stem, to reduce the rate of respiration or use of food, and 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 the water with cut flowers does not prolong their life. In fact, the life of most cut flowers is shortened by aspirin.

To help the arrangement last, place it in a cool location in the room. Keep it 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, one of the roses droops down with a bent stem. This is heartbreaking! Before giving up on the rose, try to revive it.

As soon as you notice, take it out of the arrangement and place it in a broad, shallow pan, sink, or bathtub with warm water, about 100 degrees F. Cut off one-half to one inch of stem from the end with a sharp knife or sharp shears while holding it under water to prevent air from getting into the water-conducting tissue of the stem. 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. After it has 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 fall, 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 attached. Mix other dried flowers or fillers with the roses to make a beautiful, dried bouquet.

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

Houseplants allow for a long period of enjoyment. A popular houseplant, that tolerates low light levels found in homes and offices, is the Peace Lily (*Spathiphyllum* species). It forms a clump of pretty, green leaves with white, spoon-shaped flowers. Other plants that tolerate low light conditions include: Chinese evergreen (*Aglaonema*), dumb cane (*Dieffenbachia*),

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Dracaena, *Philodendron*, snake plant (*Dracaena trifasciata*), arrow head plant (*Syngonium*), and zee zee plant (*Zamioculcas*).

Another plant gift is a container of cacti and/or succulents. Check the information attached to the container since light requirements vary with the plants in the collection. Generally, bright indirect light is best. Look at the plant tag for watering information. In general, let the soil dry to the touch before watering.

A unique plant gift is an air plant (*Tillandsia* spp.). It is an epiphyte and anchors itself to other plants but does not harm them. These unique plants are often displayed in glass globes, on top of gravel or moss, or attached with a wire to objects that are not damaged by water. Mist the plant with water once a week; avoid water puddling around the plant. Place it in a bright area with indirect light.

Phalaenopsis or moth orchid plants have flowers that last for several weeks. Do not cut the flower stalk back after blossoms fade because in a few months, it may branch to form additional flowers. New plants may also develop on those flower stalks. Place them in an area receiving medium light.

Anthurium or flamingo flower is a plant with a colorful modified leaf called a spathe. The spathe color, depending on the cultivar, may be bright red, pink, salmon, or white. A spadix, which is a stalk of densely packed flowers, is in the middle of the spathe. Bright indirect light is needed. Make sure the soil dries slightly to the touch before watering it again. The anthurium is poisonous if people and pest ingest any part of the plant. Keep it out of the way of curious children and pets.

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For more information about care of fresh flowers and houseplants for Valentine's Day, 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.

Upcoming Meetings:

"Getting the Most from the Vegetable Garden" will be presented at the Daviess County Public Library on February 18 at 2:00 p.m. as part of the opening of the Seed Library put together by the Extension Master Gardeners and library. Discussion will include taking advantage of the late winter, spring, and fall growing seasons.

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