

episode 72 show notes and advice

Episode Description

As summer comes into full throttle and the garden is full of lovely things, learn how to turn garden flowers into wonderful indoor flowers to have all over your house. Sarah and Arthur share all their top cut flower conditioning tips on today's podcast, the things that will make the difference between your flowers lasting a few days or a few weeks.

In this episode, discover...

- Learn how to sear cut flowers following Sarah's tried and tested method
- Tips to rescue flopping flowers
- Why submerging flowers is perfect for peonies, hydrangeas and foliage
- Try Sarah's sugar syrup trick to elongate your sweet peas vase life

episode 72 advice sheet

Arthur's number 1 tip

Get your flowers into water straight away. Take a bucket (or a mug) and place your cut flowers straight into cool water. This gives them the maximum chance of looking beautiful for as long as possible.

Searing

Do sear stem ends. Sarah learnt this from her aunt, picking artemisia for Christmas flowers, which without searing, flops quickly.

How Sarah sears her cut flowers

Pour boiling water into a mug and sear 10% of the stem end then place immediately into cold water after. The length of time Sarah sears stems for is proportional to the texture of the stem.

5 seconds – for things like a bluebell

10 seconds – for ammi or cosmos

20 seconds – for a woody rose

30 seconds – for blossom or a crab apple branch

What Sarah sears is proportional to the season too. In spring she sears 75-80% of what she picks (apart from bulbs which don't need searing). In summer it's more like 50%. Then in autumn it's 25%. This is because in spring, flower stems are new and soft, and the stem cells haven't laid

down any lignin, the substance that makes bark. Throughout the season, more lignin develops which is why in autumn, less plants need searing.

Searing works by increasing the surface area of the stem for increased water absorption.

Bashing stem ends is another technique Sarah's mum uses for the same reason.

How to sear a supermarket bunch of flowers

If in doubt sear – you won't do anything any harm and you'll do a lot of things a lot of good. Sear the whole bunch, about 1 inch of the stem ends into boiling water and then put into cold water.

How to help floppy flowers

Even when something has flopped, searing can help get it back to a good state. Sear then place in cold water, somewhere cool and dark and, almost always, this will resurrect your flowers.

Floating flowers

Recently Arthur filled a water feature at Perch Hill with glamorous bunches of floating flowers – Amelanchier, hellebores and white blossom. He was taught about submerging flowers by Sarah. This method is particularly effective for foliage, like cardoon leaves with a huge surface area. Submerged for a few hours to overnight, the whole surface of the leaf can absorb the water. Submerging is great for all blossoms, anything tight in bud including white peonies, Cotinus – the smoke bush, and is very effective with hydrangeas later on in the season. Submerge stems, flowers and leaves under water.

Swaddle tulips to prevent croquet hoop stems

People always ask Sarah how to stop tulips drooping like croquet hoops. Her top tips are:

1. Grow your own tulips and follow methods above so your tulips are not dehydrated.
2. For bought tulips, which so often are dehydrated, rewrap them in newspaper or tissue, cut the stem ends (don't sear) and leave for 3 or 4 hours immersed in deep cool water. The cone of paper holds floppy heads vertical so they rehydrate vertically and stay vertical with the paper off.
3. For massive heavy-headed Parrot tulips such as 'Amazing Parrot' or 'Green Wave', the growth plate is beneath the flower head. The new cells growing here are so newly divided they have no lignin, so by day 3 or 4 they start flopping over. Prevent this by putting a pin or darning needle through the stem, just below the flower, and make a hole and then remove the pin/needle – you don't leave the pin in. This disrupts the cellular division in the growth plate so you don't get the same amount of growth or flopping. So

called 'Tulip Girls' used to be employed at Easter in stately homes precisely to do this, to spear the tulips cut from the walled gardens, for upright arrangements!

Staking amaryllis

Staking is ideal for amaryllis, which have hollow stems, and can help them last 4 weeks in a vase. Place a thin twig or cane up the hollow stem, more than halfway up but not up to the flower. Then rubber band the end of the stem to the cane. The band will stop the stem splitting and curling up like a quaver crisp. Double-flowered amaryllis like 'Aleppo' are very long-lasting in the vase, kept somewhere cool.

Sugar for sweet peas

Sarah makes sugar syrup for sweet peas only – a slosh in the water seems to make the difference of a couple of days so they last up to 7 days.

We don't use bleach, instead occasionally a slosh of vinegar for something long-lasting like cut alliums. Because the stems start to rot after a week or so, a good slosh of white vinegar helps stop this.

Depth of water is also important. For things with a good 3-4 week vase life, such as amaryllis or alliums, alstroemerias or chrysanthus, the general rule is to not overfill your vase with water but to put the flowers in shallow water.

And don't forget to keep topping up your vases with water. Every morning Sarah tops up her vases around the house and in the cookery and gardening school. This is crucial!

Arthur and Sarah's final tips

Going back to Arthur's top tip at the start, if you are taking a lovely bunch of flowers to give to someone, save things like jam jars so you always transport your flowers in water.

Sarah's advice for bridesmaids' posies is to put damp kitchen roll around the stems, then wrap in clingfilm and then some pretty fabric or ribbon, to keep the moisture in so the flowers still have access to water.

To recap

- Searing – for all cut flowers except bulbs
- Submerging – for large surface area things like peonies, hydrangeas and foliage
- Staking – for amaryllis

- Swaddling – tulips and gerberas
- Sugar – for sweet peas
- Sterilising – for lilies – remove anthers to help lily flower longer