



Extension News Column

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Today is Valentine's Day. If you are lucky, you may receive a beautiful bouquet of flowers or a potted plant. Pinching pennies is still a possibility, even on this most popular day for florists. In this case, we are looking at prolonging the life of those beautiful flowers and plants.

If you receive a bouquet of flowers and are going to arrange them in your own vase, cleanliness is the key. That vase you have in the cabinet needs to be impeccably clean. Wash it out with soap. Bacteria clinging to the sides will contaminate your water shortening the life of your flowers.

Before arranging, put the stems under water and cut at an angle. Put away those scissors, they can crush the stem. Instead, use a sharp, non-serrated knife to cut $\frac{1}{4}$ inch off the bottom of stems. That will allow more cells to be exposed to water for peak freshness. Also, cut off all those leaves below the water line. They breed bacteria.

Change the water in the vase every other day and use the preservative that comes with the flowers. If you are out of preservative, make your own solution from $\frac{1}{4}$ lemon-lime soda, $\frac{3}{4}$ water, and a couple of drops of bleach. Or when you get flowers, ask the florist for extra packets of the preservative.

Keep those gorgeous flowers away from fruit. Fruit emits ethylene gas that will shorten the life of the flowers. Even if the fruit is in a separate bowl, make sure it is away from the flowers.

Sunshine makes those flowers look beautiful, but it will shorten the life of the flowers. The heat from direct sunlight will kill them in a day or two.

After the flowers are but a memory, recycle that vase. Most florists will take it back and recycle it. But I'd like to make another suggestion. I work with the flower division at the Tanana Valley Fair. Each year, we provide vases for all the entries (sometimes as many as 700) for fair. We could use your old vases for display. Drop your old vases by the Fair office, or by my office and we'll get them to the fairgrounds. If you are like me, you probably have a whole cabinet full of these vases that are just in the way. The Flower division could make good use of them.

Potted plants are another popular gift for your sweetie. Though the beauty is more enduring, it too will fade with incorrect care. Make sure you know what type of plant you have and what is the best care for that plant. Many plants come with a tag that lists care instructions. If you don't know, google it on the internet and see what care is recommended. Be sure to follow these instructions.

Water only when the plants are dry. Overwatering is much more common than underwatering and can kill a plant just as quickly. Stick your finger in the top inch of soil. If it's evenly slightly damp, don't water.

If it is a flowering plant, make sure you cut off spent blooms as they die. If the leaves start turning brown, pluck them off the plant. If they are large leaves such as dracaena or diffenbachia, trim the brown sections on the leaves. The plant is still sending nutrients to the dead part of the plant. Trim it away the dead sections and the plant will stay healthier.

In our long Alaskan winters, flowers, both plants and blooms, give us a much needed burst of green. Make sure that yours are properly cared for and they will give you long lasting pleasure.

There is one more item to make note of this week. The CES office is moving to new quarters. We will be closed on Friday the 18th and Monday the 21st, then will be open again to the public on the 22nd in our new home at the Food Bank. We will be located on the second floor of the 27th Street entrance. Our address is 724 27th Street, Suite 2. All phone numbers and email addresses will remain the same.

Watch for an open house in April. But until then, come by and see us.