

Before a holiday trip, put cut flowers in a clean vase with fresh water, trim the stems and place the arrangement in a cool spot away from direct sun. For a long trip, ask someone to change the water and remove fading flowers, since a vase cannot keep every stem fresh indefinitely.

Start with a clean vase

Empty the vase and wash it with warm water and dish soap. Rinse it thoroughly before adding fresh, cool water. A clean container helps limit the buildup of bacteria that can shorten the life of cut flowers.

Fill the vase high enough to cover several inches of stem, but leave room at the top so it can be carried without spilling. A stable vase is a better choice than a narrow, top heavy container if it will stand unattended.

Prepare the stems

Use clean, sharp scissors or pruning shears to cut a small amount from the bottom of each stem. An angled cut gives the stem a fresh surface through which to take up water. Put the stems back in water promptly after cutting them.

Remove any leaves that would sit below the waterline. Submerged leaves can decay and make the water cloudy. Take off flowers or petals that are already fading, and check that no stem is so crowded that it is bent or crushed.

Choose a place for the vase

Set the flowers in a cool room out of direct sunlight. Keep them away from radiators, heaters and vents that blow warm air. Also leave space between the vase and ripening fruit, which releases ethylene gas that can speed the

aging of some flowers.

Choose a surface that will not be damaged if water spills. If curtains will be closed or heating settings changed during your trip, check the conditions the flowers will actually have while you are away.

Make a care plan

For a short trip, clean water and a cool position may be enough to help the flowers last until you return. Their condition will still depend on the types of flowers and how fresh they were when cut.

For a longer absence, ask someone to check the vase every couple of days. Leave these simple instructions:

- Top up the water if the level has dropped.
- Change cloudy water and rinse the vase before refilling it.
- Remove faded flowers and any leaves that have fallen into the water.
- Trim the stem ends again if practical, then return them to water.

Questions about leaving cut flowers

Should I add flower food?

If you have flower food, follow the packet directions for the amount of water in the vase. Do not add extra in the hope that it will make the flowers last longer.

Can I leave flowers without anyone checking them?

Yes, but water levels and flower condition can change while you are away. A check is especially useful if the trip lasts several days.

Should I put the vase in the refrigerator?

A cool room is a simpler choice. Refrigerator temperatures and nearby produce can be unsuitable for some cut flowers.

What should I do when I get home?

Discard any decayed stems, wash the vase and give remaining flowers fresh water and a new stem cut.

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