

ADDENDUM - FLORAL DESIGN GUIDE FOR CHURCHES

Reprinted with permission from an article published by the National Cathedral Altar Guild

Getting Ready:

All flowers should be well conditioned before use. Begin by removing all foliage below the water line; cutting stems at an angle under water; and placing the blossoms in warm water to which a commercial floral preservative has been added. The blooms benefit greatly from one to two hours conditioning before use. Use of floral conditioner in the water used to soak the floral foam and in water added to the finished arrangement will significantly prolong the life of the flowers. When soaking foam always use the "float method," allowing the brick of foam to float freely on top of the water and sink at its own pace. Resist the temptation to hurry it along by just a few seconds by pushing it down under the water! When using instant Oasis foam, place it in the container with the holes facing upward so that water can be more easily absorbed when adding it to the finished arrangement.

Always start with clean containers and new Oasis. Do not reuse foam. Used Oasis harbors bacteria which speeds flower wilt; and, once dried out, used Oasis cannot properly absorb water. Additionally, holes left by removed stems create air pockets in the foam. If the end of a newly placed stem is accidentally placed in that spot, the bloom will die quickly because there is no water supply.

Containers and Mechanics

Large pedestal arrangements, particularly tall ones with large stems or branches, benefit from support by the addition of chick wire or a wire cage over the Oasis. The wire support is attached with waterproof tape to the outside of the dish. This support helps significantly to prevent the Oasis from crumbling from the weight of heavy stems. The

waterproof tape is quite strong but must be applied to a completely dry surface in order to adhere. Do not use this tape on pews or fine brass or silver containers because the adhesive material is extremely hard to remove.

Some design suggestions:

Have a plan

Choose materials and containers that are appropriate for the occasion and setting. Consider using some of the many interesting containers that are available for doing

church flowers. In addition to the traditional brass or silver containers there are suitable baskets of many sizes and shapes, hanging baskets, stone or lead urns, boxes for "gardens," Lomey cages, wreaths, and igloos, to name just a few!

Balance

A well-executed design is balanced both physically and visually. The weight and amount of the materials used and their placement affect physical balance and stability in the arrangement. Visual design is influenced by factors such as weight, color, and texture of both the container and the plant materials used.

Begin by establishing the lines of the arrangement with greenery. Traditionally the general rule of thumb has been that an arrangement should be about 1 ½ times the height of the container. There are exceptions to this rule, particularly with some of the newer contemporary styles.

In doing church floral designs we are often called upon to create matched pair arrangements. Creating matching pairs can be a bit of a challenge and requires teamwork when two are working at this task! It is often helpful to designate one person as the lead in creating the design. Producing matched pairs is made easier by simultaneously cutting stems for the two arrangements. One person holds, matches, and cuts both stems, one for each arrangement. Working together in this way saves time and effort.

Avoid crossing stems and arranging blooms in lines that abruptly change directions. It is helpful to visualize an imaginary root ball of the arrangement with the stems radiating out from the central point of that root ball.

Material selection

Three major flower shapes are often used to create interest and emphasis in a mixed flower arrangement. These are: *line* (snaps, larkspur, stock, Bells of Ireland); *round* (roses, daisies, carnations, mums); and *irregulars* (lilies, bird of paradise, ginger.) It is generally more pleasing to use odd numbers of flowers: 1, 3, 5, etc. Filler or secondary flowers should repeat the shape of the overall design in a rhythmic way.

Many flowers, such as snapdragons, are photo sensitive and grow upwards or towards the light. Tulips often grow several inches in one day. These characteristics should be considered when planning bloom placement in the arrangement.

Creating a focal point

A strong focal point gives the arrangement greater impact. A focal area is enhanced by using smaller flowers farthest away from the focal point with gradual progression in flower size toward the focal point. Flowers in the center of the focal point usually face forward, with those farthest away facing toward the sides and upward. Avoid the headlight effect of equal spacing of flowers and having all flowers facing forward in one direction.

The focal point should be prominent (as opposed to concave) with major flowers toward the front of the arrangement. Integrate the arrangement with the container by bringing greenery or flowers over the lip of the container.

Depth is achieved by using some flowers in profile and by varying the depth of their placement in the arrangement. Space should be left around the flowers so that they do not crowd and compete. A dense-looking or "packed" arrangement can be remedied by adding smaller, lighter material toward the outside edges of the design.

Weedy or spindly arrangements can often be improved by adding greenery or flowers deep toward the center of the arrangements, covering stems.

Emphasis is created and the design enhanced by intentionally grouping like flowers. It is generally helpful to arrange all of the flowers of one kind in an arrangement before starting on the next flower. Lining up flowers in distracting patterns, e.g., using 3 or 4 large gerberas in a distinct line leading the eye away from the overall design, is usually avoided in traditional flower designs.

Stand back frequently and look at the arrangement from a distance, both from the front and sides. Arrangements done in the confines of the chancel look very different when seen from the back of the sanctuary!

In creating arrangements, we constantly switch our focus from the forest to the trees and back again, first paying attention to the overall design, then deciding where the next flower will be inserted.

When inserting a stem into the Oasis, it is helpful to focus primary attention on the bloom end of the stem rather than its insertion point. This optimizes final bloom placement.

Beware the crooked stem! Stems with abrupt bends are difficult to use and rarely go where expected or wanted in the arrangement. It is far easier to cut the stem above the bend and go on from there. The stem should be inserted securely at least **two inches** into the foam, making sure, however, that it does not go all the way through and stick into the air on the opposite side of the block of foam. If you goof (as we all do,) it is best

not to remove the stem. Instead, cut it at the point where it enters the foam then reinsert into an unused area, thus avoiding creating a hole in the Oasis. If a stem is just a bit too short, do not just ease it out and leave it in the same hole to create that extra height.

Doing this creates an air pocket causing the flower to wilt quickly because the stem is out of water. Instead, use another bloom with a longer stem, inserting it into a new spot in the Oasis.

Some thoughts about color

Be aware that blues and purples are cool, receding colors that cannot be seen from a distance or in dim light. Unfortunately, in dim light these lovely colors visually translate into dark holes in the finished arrangement. Blues are used to greater advantage against light background, in bright light, and in close proximity. Dark arrangements can be livened by adding touches of white or yellow tucked deep in the arrangement.

Special care is in order when using red and white flowers! If these flowers are not grouped, the overall arrangement may look like a case of the measles or buckshot, particularly when seen from a distance!

Endings

An important but often difficult flower arranging lesson is learning when to stop! While it is tempting to overwork the design by adding "just a few more stems," it is far better to quit while you're ahead! Be sure, though, that the back of the arrangement is finished, even if it is only with greenery. One good final check of your design is to view it through the lens of a camera. Difficulties in balance, color and spacing are much easier to identify through the aperture of a camera. Making a photographic record is also a useful way of tracking our progress and learning from our work.

Water is vital to the life of the flower arrangement. The vase life of the flowers is maximized by thoroughly watering the finished flower arrangement. Water should be added to the top of the arrangement since the floral foam cannot draw water from below. Watering the arrangement is made considerably easier by leaving a space between the floral foam and the side of the container. During hot weather flowers benefit from misting. Adding ice cubes to the top of the foam not only provides cooling but allows for slow, thorough soaking of moisture into the finished arrangement. If possible, the arrangement should be placed away from light and heat sources.