The Ultimate Flower Conditioning Guide

WHEN TO HARVEST & HOW TO CONDITION THE TOP 50 CUT FLOWERS



Whether you're harvesting for market bouquets, weddings, or your own kitchen table, how and when you cut your flowers can make or break their vase life.

EACH VARIETY HAS A PRECISE WINDOW — CUT TOO EARLY AND THEY NEVER OPEN, TOO LATE AND THEY COLLAPSE IN 48 HOURS.

This guide covers when to harvest each flower for the best results, and how to condition them so they stay fresher, longer. From snapdragons to strawflower, we've included insider tips on searing, stripping, hydrating, and even drying — all in one place.

Because vase life isn't luck. It's timing, technique, and a very clean bucket.

X Jane

BULBS & TUBERS



Tulip

- Harvest: In bud, showing the faintest blush of colour
- Conditioning: Dry store upright with bulb for 1–3 weeks in fridge, or cut and place in cool water
- Vase Life: 5-7 Days

Tip: wrap tightly in paper to keep the stems straight



Ranunculus

- Harvest: Best harvested when the bloom has colored up and feels soft and springy—like a marshmallow
- Conditioning: Straight into water, rest in cool place for 4–6 hrs
- Vase Life: 7-10 Days

Tip: Too tight and they won't open

Daffodil (Narcissus)

- Gooseneck for singles: When the bud bends 90–120°, showing colour but not yet open
- ½-open stage for doubles/frills: Wait until the flower is half-open to ensure full opening and vase life (If picked too early, they remain tight or fail to open; too late, and the petals degrade quickly—reducing vase life.)
- (Harvesting before the gooseneck stage ("pencil" stage) in any daffodil means they may never open fully)
- Conditioning Tips (same across types):
- Harvest by hand (don't snip): Grasp and gently pull from the base to keep more stem and reduce sap flow
- Separate conditioning: Let stems drain sap in cool water for 4-6 hours before mixing with other flowers (No recutting later: Once conditioned, avoid further stem cuts sap starts flowing again with each fresh cut) You can also sear the ends in boiling water which will stop the flow of sap much quicker.
- Vase Life: 4-6 Days



Anemone

- Harvest: Cut when the bloom sits -¼-½ inch above the frilly collar beneath the flower—that gentle lift signals the ideal maturity: open enough to bloom, but not so open that longevity is compromised
- Conditioning: Straight into water, rest in cool place for 4–8 hrs
- Vase Life: 5-8 Days

Tip: Avoid direct light post-harvest to slow opening



Allium

- Harvest: Cut when the flower head is about half open —this hits the sweet spot where blooms look bold but still retain optimal vase life. This timing ensures maximum stem uptake and longevity without sacrificing aesthetics.
- Conditioning: Sear in boiling water for 30 seconds, rest 12 hrs
- Vase Life: 7-10 Days

Tip: Strip all leaves as they rot quickly



DAHLIA

- HARVEST: NEARLY FULLY OPEN (THEY WON'T OPEN AFTER CUTTING)
- Conditioning: Straight into water, rest for 6–12 hrs. Re-cut and sear the stems if they droop
- VASE LIFE: 3-5 DAYS

TIP: HARVEST FREQUENTLY AND CHECK THE BACK OF THE FLOWER FOR BROWN PETALS. IF ANY BROWNING OF PETALS IS VISIBLE DISCARD THOSE BLOOMS - IT'S TOO LATE AND THE WON'T LAST IN THE VASE



Gladiolus

- Harvest: Aim for spikes with 1–2 open lower florets, with the remaining buds mostly closed—this ensures a graceful opening while prolonging vase life
- Conditioning: In deep water for 12 hours Tip: Re-cut daily for best vase life
- Vase Life: 7-14 Days



Freesia

- Harvest: when the bottom flowers are open and the top buds coloured
- Conditioning: Cool rest with water
 + flower food
- Vase Life: 7-10 Days

Tip: Avoid bunching too tightly to allow air flow

ANNUALS & BIENNIALS



Sweet Pea (Lathyrus odoratus)

- Harvest: When just 1–2 flowers open per stem
- Conditioning: Straight into cool water, rest for 6 hrs
- Vase Life: 3-5 Days

Tip: Pick daily to encourage more blooms to form



Snapdragons (Antirrhinum)

- Harvest: From adjust a handful of blooms at the Bottom to one third of florets open on the stem
- Conditioning: Rest 6–12 hrs
- Vase Life: 5-8 Days

Tip: Stems will bend upwards so support then straight while conditioning



Stocks (Matthiola)

- Harvest: When the Most florets open and the stem has elongated and developed the flowers (don't pick too early)
- Conditioning: Cool water, full rest.
- Vase Life: 5-7 Days

Tip: Wait for 6-7 flower rings on stem



Larkspur (Consolida)

- Harvest: Bottom quarter open
- Conditioning: Rest 12 hrs in water
- Vase Life: 5-7 Days



Ammi

- Harvest: Before flowers fully open while they are still domed
- Conditioning: Cool water, rest 4–6 hrs
- Vase Life: 5-7 Days

Tip: Sear soft stems in boiling water if drooping



Cornflower (Centaurea cyanus)

- Harvest: when the first few flowers begin to open on the stem the rest will open in the vase;
- Conditioning: Cool water, rest 4 hrs
- Vase Life: 5-7 Days

Tip: Deadhead spent flowers to encourage more blooms



Cosmos

- Harvest: When they have just opened (not tight buds)
- Conditioning: Water + bleach or vinegar, rest 8 hrs
- Vase Life: 4-6 Days

Tip: Daily water changes — pollens quickly cloud the water and make it dirty



Zinnia

- Harvest: Pass the wiggle test (stiff stem, no wobble)
- Conditioning: Water with bleach, rest 6–12 hr
- Vase Life: 6-8 Days

Tip: They are a notoriously dirty flower — so change water daily



Nigella (Love-in-a-Mist)

- Harvest: Flowers just opening or green pods forming
- Conditioning: Cool water, rest 6 hrs
- Vase Life: 5-7 Days

Tip: Great for fresh or dried



Calendula

- Harvest: Fully open flowers
- Conditioning: In cool water and rest for 6 hrs
- Vase Life: 3-5 Days

Tip: Short vase life — better for shortterm designs



Giganteum Poppy (Papaver somniferum 'Giganteum')

- Harvest (for seed pods): Wait until 2-4 weeks after petals drop. Pods will swell significantly.
- Conditioning: Cut just before the seed holes appear at the top of the pod (or right after if drying). Place upright in water to prevent tipping.
- Vase Life: Everlasting

Tip: For fresh use, pods should still be green and firm. For dried, hang upside down in a well-ventilated space out of direct light.



Briza (Quaking Grass)

- Harvest: When seed heads are fully formed, green or just beginning to blush with bronze tones before they shatter.
- Conditioning: Strip lower foliage, place in cool water, rest for 4–6 hours.
- Vase Life: Everlasting

Tip: Excellent fresh or dried. For drying, cut when seed heads are firm but not brittle and hang upside down in bunches out of direct light. Adds brilliant movement and texture to bouquets.



Bunny's Tails (Lagurus ovatus)

- Harvest: When the heads are fully formed, fluffy, and still pale green or just turning ivory. Don't wait until they dry completely on the plant they'll shatter.
- Conditioning: Strip foliage, place in cool water to hydrate for 4–6 hours if using fresh.
- Vase Life: Everlasting

Tip: For dried use, harvest at peak fluffiness and hang upside down in loose bunches in a dark, dry spot. Holds shape beautifully and adds soft texture to dried designs.



Icelandic Poppy (Papaver nudicaule)

- Harvest: Cut in the Cracking bud stage before they open
- Conditioning: Sear stems in Boiling water and rest overnight
- Vase Life: 3-5 Days

Tip: Cut in the early morning before the sun and heat starts to open them



Scabious

- Harvest: Just before full open for longest vase life
- Conditioning: Water, rest 6–12 hrs
- Vase Life: 6-8 Days

Tip: harvest in all stages from tight bud to just opening and in the seed stage they all look great!



Statice (Limonium)

- Harvest: in full colour before they
- Conditioning: can be dried straight away for use or placed in water
- Vase Life: Everlasting



Strawflower (Helichrysum)

- Harvest: When 1–2 rows of petals are open
- Conditioning: Can be hung p to air dry or in a bucket of water
- Vase Life: Everlasting

Tip: Don't wait too long to harvest as they they shatter



Lisianthus (Eustoma)

 Harvest: when the first 1–2 buds open

Conditioning: Cool water and rest for 12

Vase Life: 7-10 Days



Sunflower

- Harvest: Petals just lifting from centre disk
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- Conditioning: Cool water with bleach, rest 6 hrs
- Vase Life: 6-12 Days

Tip: Change water daily — sappy stems cloud the water fast



Rudbeckia

- Harvest: Fully open flowers, fresh centres
- Conditioning: Cool water, rest 4 hrs
- Vase Life: 7-10 Days

PERENNIALS & SHRUBS



Astrantia (Masterwort)

- Harvest: When all the tiny central florets are open and the star-shaped bracts are firm avoid cutting in tight bud as they won't develop much after harvest.
- Conditioning: Re-cut stems and place in deep, cool water for 6–12 hours. Use clean buckets and strip all lower foliage.
- Vase Life: 6-8 Days

Tip: Very prone to drooping if dehydrated — harvest early morning or after watering. Can be seared in boiling water for 20 seconds if stems are soft. Also dries beautifully when picked at peak.



Echinacea

- Harvest: Fully open, fresh cone
- Conditioning: In Cool water and rest 4–6 hrs
- Vase Life: 5-7 Days



Alchemilla (Lady's Mantle)

- Harvest: When chartreuse sprays are fully developed
- Conditioning: In Cool water and rest 4–6 hrs
- Vase Life: 5-7 Days



Yarrow (Achillea)

- Harvest: Flat-topped heads fully open
- Conditioning: Water, rest 6–12 hrs
- Vase Life: 6-10 Days

Tip: Dip end in boiling water o prevent wilting



Sedum

- Harvest: Flowers just opening
- Conditioning: In cool water and rest for 6 hrs
- Vase Life: 10-+14 Days

Tip: Very long vase life



Verbena bonariensis

- Harvest: Only just open purple heads not dry
- Conditioning: Rest in water for 4 hours
- Vase Life: 4-7 Days

Tip: Excellent for airy height



Chrysanthemum

- Harvest: When nearly in full bloom
- Conditioning: Water with a drop of bleach or vinegar and rest for 12 hrs
- Vase Life: 10-14 Days

Tip: Change the water daily



Lavender

- Harvest: Just before full bloom
- Conditioning: Dry or water, rest 4
- Vase Life: Everlasting Tip: Brilliant dried



Delphinium

- Harvest: When only the bottom few florets are open
- Conditioning: Cool water, and rest for 12 hrs
- Vase Life: 5-7 Days

Tip: The stems are super fragile so support then upright during conditioning



- Harvest: Cut in the Soft, marshmallow bud stage
- Conditioning: Strip all of the lower stems and place in cool water (or or wrap in paper and store in the fridge for up to 3 weeks)
- Vase Life: 5-10 Days

Tip: Do not pick tight buds as they will not open





Mint (Mentha)

- Harvest: when stems are mature to prevent wilting
- · Conditioning: Sear stems in boiling water to prevent wilting
- Vase Life: 3-5 Days

Tip: Gorgeous scent and great when in flower too



Cerinthe

- Harvest: When bracts have full colour
- · Conditioning: Sear end in boiling water to prevent wilting and rest overnight
- Vase Life: 3-5 Days

Tip: Very prone to wilting, ensure they are fully rested overnight before use



Euphorbia

- Harvest: Fresh stems with gloves on!
- Conditioning: Sear the ends in boiling water and condition separately as the sap is toxic
- Vase Life: 3-7 Days

Tip: Avoid contact with skin - wear gloves

Grasses (Panicum, Miscanthus, etc.)

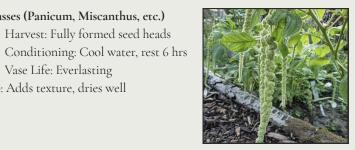
• Harvest: Fully formed seed heads



Eucalyptus (Parvifolia, Cinerea)

- Harvest: Firm. mature blue-green
- Conditioning: Water + flower food, rest 12 hrs
- Vase Life: 10-14 Days

Tip: Long vase life, dries well. Do not harvest too early in the season when stems are immature as they will wilt!



Amaranthus (Love Lies Bleeding)

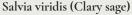
- Harvest: when tassels are long and still have fresh colour
- Conditioning: Remove ALL leaves
- Vase Life: 10-14 Days + 12 weeks if dried

Tip: will do well without a water source as long as all of the leaves are removed and dries well retaining colour for around 12 weeks



Tip: Adds texture, dries well

• Vase Life: Everlasting



- Harvest: When colourful bracts (not just the tiny true flowers) are fully developed and vivid usually midspike bloom.
- Conditioning: Strip lower leaves, place immediately in cool, clean water. Rest for 4–6 hours.
- Vase Life: 5-7 Days

Tip: If stems are soft or prone to flopping, give a quick 20-second sear in boiling water. Great for both fresh and dried use — retains colour well when air-dried.







WOODY BLOOMS & BRANCHES



Lilac (Syringa)

- Harvest: when up to half of the flowers are open
- Conditioning: Split stems or bash ends, rest overnight
- Vase Life: 2-3 Days

Tip: Use within 48 hrs



Viburnum

- Harvest: Full flower heads
- Conditioning: Split stems and rest for 12 hours
- Vase Life: 5-7 Days

Tip: Great spring foliage filler too



Garden Roses

- Harvest: Just before they open
- Conditioning: Sear the stems in boiling water and rest for 12 hours
- Vase Life: 5-7 Days

Tip: Remove guard petals and thorns



Hydrangea

- Harvest: when petals are papery but not crispy to retain colour for as long as possible
- Conditioning: Split stems and rest for 12 hours
- Vase Life: 5-10 Days + Everlasting Tip: Dip the flower heads in water for extra hydration

BEAUTIFUL FLOWERS DESERVE PROPER CARE. WHETHER YOU'RE CUTTING COSMOS FROM YOUR BACK GARDEN OR HARVESTING A SEA OF DAHLIAS FOR MARKET.

Conditioning is what transforms a good bouquet into a great one. It's the quiet ritual behind the scenes — buckets filled, stems seared, and blooms rested — that gives your flowers the best chance to shine.

Bookmark this guide, print it out, tape it to your shed door if you like... and come back to it whenever you need to treat your stems like the floral royalty they are.