

Summer Floral Centerpieces

Summer is a great time for entertaining. Somehow food just seems to taste



better when it is served outdoors. But you don't have to settle for paper plates and an ordinary red and white checked tablecloth for those special summer dinners. Make your summertime get-togethers even more special by serving your meal on a beautifully set table.

Simply put, tablescaping is the art of arranging decorative items on tables. Matt and I have discovered that the addition of a centerpiece or decorative element to a tabletop can change it from an ordinary piece of furniture into a work of art.

Fresh flowers from your garden are a perfect way to create a work of art. Just as different decorating styles are achieved through color and design, different flowers can be used to create specific moods.



Are you hosting a summer bridal shower? Why not use white linen tablecloths adorned with short crystal vases of tea roses. Are you having friends for a summer time picnic? Fresh daisies and sunflowers in a country crock make a perfect arrangement for a casual gathering. Are you interested in a more sophisticated look? Wild grasses in glass or metal containers present the sleek, urban look.

Your summer centerpiece does require a bit of planning. First, choose an appropriate container for your flowers. Heavy containers are best for outdoor arrangements, as they are less likely to be tipped over by the wind. You can, however, make any vase weightier with the addition of gravel or stones. If your vase is clear glass, consider using clear floral marbles to provide additional weight.

Once you've determined your container, the next step is choosing the flowers or greenery. Partially fill a clean plastic bucket with bottled water. It is important to use bottled water because the chemical and minerals in tap water stops the flow of water into the floral stems. To further maintain freshness, add a half teaspoon of bleach to the water and let it sit at room temperature for thirty minutes.



As you walk through your garden choosing stems for your arrangements, look for flowers that are almost, but not quite, in full bloom. Flowers with crisp firm petals and buds that are beginning to open are best. Greenery should be crisp without any discolorations.

Using a sharp clippers or pruning shears, cut the stems fairly long and at an angle. Place the stems immediately in the water. Set the flowers in a shady spot and let them soak up the water for several hours.

After the flowers have properly hydrated, begin to cut the stems to your desired length. To stop the growth of bacteria, remove any leaves which will be below the water line. Using a sharp knife, recut the stems under water and place them immediately in a container filled with the bottled water and bleach mixture.

If your container has a narrow neck opening, you can arrange the flowers by first weaving them through your fingers. Once you've achieved a pretty design, place the flowers into the container. You may have to go back and adjust the height of some stems.

If you are using a wide neck container, you can stabilize the arrangement by creating a grid using strips of transparent tape. The tape will hold the flowers in place as you design your centerpiece, but will be hidden as more flowers are added.

Once you've completed your centerpiece, you can easily choose the colors



for the rest of your table. Whether using a formal linen table cloth, or informal checked placemats, be sure the colors complement the centerpiece. Choose similar colors for the plates and glasses, and you'll find your guests oohing and ahing over your beautiful summer tablescape.

A pretty table can help set the tone for an evening of summer entertaining. Believe it or not, it could even cut down on your food preparation, because even hotdogs will seem like a feast when served at a beautifully set table!

Shari

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