

Cut flower stems with clean, sharp shears, then place them in water while you prepare a low centerpiece. Trim each stem again to suit the vase, keeping flowers below eye level so guests can see one another across the table.

Choose flowers and a container

Pick flowers that are open enough to look good at dinner, along with a few buds for variety. Sturdy blooms and foliage are easier to arrange than delicate stems that wilt quickly. Avoid flowers with damaged petals, brown edges, or a strong scent that could compete with the food.

Choose a clean, low vase or bowl that leaves room for plates and serving dishes. Before cutting, set the empty container on the table and check its height from a seated position. The finished arrangement should allow guests to see across it without leaning around the flowers.

Cut and prepare the stems

Gather clean shears, a bucket of water, and your vase. If you are cutting flowers from a garden, choose a cool part of the day and bring them indoors promptly.

1. Cut each garden stem with enough length to give you room to adjust it later. Place it in the bucket of water as soon as you cut it.
2. Remove leaves that would sit below the waterline in the vase. Leave upper leaves intact if they add useful color or shape.
3. Hold a stem beside the vase to judge its length. Cut the end at an angle with sharp shears, then place it in the vase water.

4. Start with foliage or a few larger flowers to establish the width. Add the remaining stems, turning the vase as you work so the arrangement looks balanced from each seat.
5. Check the centerpiece from seated height. Shorten any stems that block the view, and clear petals or leaves from the table.

Keep the centerpiece fresh

Fill the vase with fresh water before arranging, and check the level before guests arrive. Flower stems need to remain in water, so add more if necessary. If the water becomes cloudy, replace it and rinse the vase.

Keep the arrangement away from direct sun, heaters, and hot serving dishes. A cool spot helps limit wilting. If you make the centerpiece ahead of time, leave it in a cool room and bring it to the table shortly before dinner.

Common questions

How short should the flowers be?

There is no fixed length. Cut them to suit the vase and keep the highest blooms below the sightline of seated guests.

Should I cut every stem at the same length?

No. Slight differences in length give the arrangement shape and let flowers fill the space around the rim.

Can I use flowers bought in a bunch?

Yes. Remove their wrapping, strip leaves from the portion that will sit in water, and recut the stems before arranging.

How early can I make the centerpiece?

You can prepare it ahead of the meal. Keep it in a cool place, check the water, and remove any wilted material before setting the table.

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