

Cutting flower stems at an angle can help keep the cut end from sitting flat against the bottom of a vase. It may make water uptake easier, but a fresh cut and clean water matter more than the exact angle.

What an angled cut does

An angled cut leaves a sloped surface at the base of the stem. If the stem rests on the bottom of the vase, part of that surface may remain exposed to the water rather than pressed against the glass.

The cut also creates a larger exposed surface than a straight cut. That does not mean a flower will absorb more water in every case. Water travels through small channels inside the stem, and those channels can become blocked by air or bacteria.

An angle is a useful habit, not a guarantee of longer vase life. A straight, fresh cut can still work, especially if the stem is not sealed against the bottom of the container.

How to cut the stems

Use clean, sharp scissors or floral shears. Dull blades can crush the stem instead of making a neat cut. Wash the blades before use, particularly if they have been used on other plants.

Remove about one to two inches from each stem before arranging the flowers. Cut on a slant, then put the stems in water promptly. You do not need to measure the angle. A clear slant is enough.

Remove any leaves that would sit below the waterline. Leaves left in the water decay and can encourage bacterial growth. Keep the leaves above the water if you like how they look.

If you need to shorten a stem again to fit your vase, make another clean cut. Avoid smashing woody stems, since damaged tissue can decay in the water.

What else keeps flowers drinking

Start with a clean vase and fresh water. A vase that looks clean can still have residue from an earlier arrangement, so wash it with soap and rinse it well before adding flowers.

Change the water every day or two, or sooner if it looks cloudy. Rinse the vase and remove any fallen leaves. You can also trim the stems again when you change the water to expose a fresh surface.

If flower food came with the bouquet, follow the packet directions for mixing it with water. Keep the arrangement away from direct sun and sources of heat, which can make flowers lose water faster.

Common questions

Should I cut stems underwater?

You can, but it is not essential for most home arrangements. The practical priority is to make a clean cut and place the stems in water promptly.

Can an angled cut revive a wilting flower?

A fresh cut and clean water may help if the flower is having trouble taking up water. They cannot reverse aging or repair a badly damaged stem.

Next step: flowers as a business gift