



Preparing Floral Arrangements for Exhibit

Floral arrangement or design is the art of arranging flowers and other plant materials into an eye-catching and artistic display. They take on many forms and styles but always incorporate the elements and principles of design including balance, proportion, and contrast, among other things. Good floral arrangements are not only pleasing to look at, but can help others learn about various types of flowers and plants. Judges use several criteria to evaluate floral designs. There are several things the exhibitor can do to meet these criteria to the highest level and receive top placing at the fair.

Elements and Principles of Design

ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

Floral arrangements utilize the elements of design, including line, space, texture, pattern, form, color, and size, to create attractive designs. Each of the components (flowers, leaves, stem, ribbon, etc.) within the design can exhibit these characteristics.

LINE is the visual path the eye follows through the arrangement. It can be straight, curving, horizontal, vertical, diagonal, delicate, or bold, among other things.

SPACE is the area occupied by the arrangement. It is divided into positive and negative spaces. Positive space is the area occupied by materials. Negative space is the open space not occupied by materials.

TEXTURE is the appearance or feel of the surface of the elements in the design. It can be hard, soft, smooth, rough, glossy, dull, fuzzy, bumpy, prickly, or wrinkly, among other things.

PATTERN is the repeated combination of any of the other design elements such as color, form, or line.

FORM is the shape or configuration of the overall arrangement as well as individual flowers within it. It can be circular, triangular, square, arched, linear, or fan-shaped, among other things.

COLOR is the visual response of the eye to different reflected wavelengths of light. Color can be combined in different ways to achieve different effects or feelings. The primary colors (red, blue, yellow) can be used to create secondary colors (orange, green, purple) by mixing any two. The neutral colors (black, white, grey) can be used to change the value or tonal quality of any color.

- Monochromatic colors are different values or tones of one color (e.g. red, pink, maroon).
- Analogous colors are three or more colors next to each other on the color wheel (e.g. green, blue, violet).
- Complementary colors are across from each other on the color wheel (e.g. blue & orange)

SIZE is the amount of space something occupies. Both the individual components and the overall arrangement can be large or small.

PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN

The principles of design are the guidelines or “tools” used to compose the arrangement. The primary principles of design to consider are proportion, balance, dominance, rhythm, harmony, unity, and contrast.

PROPORTION is the relationship of the components within the design to each other. It is closely related to scale which considers the relative size of the design to its surroundings.

BALANCE is the stability that is achieved when the components of the design are in equilibrium. It can be either symmetrical or asymmetrical.

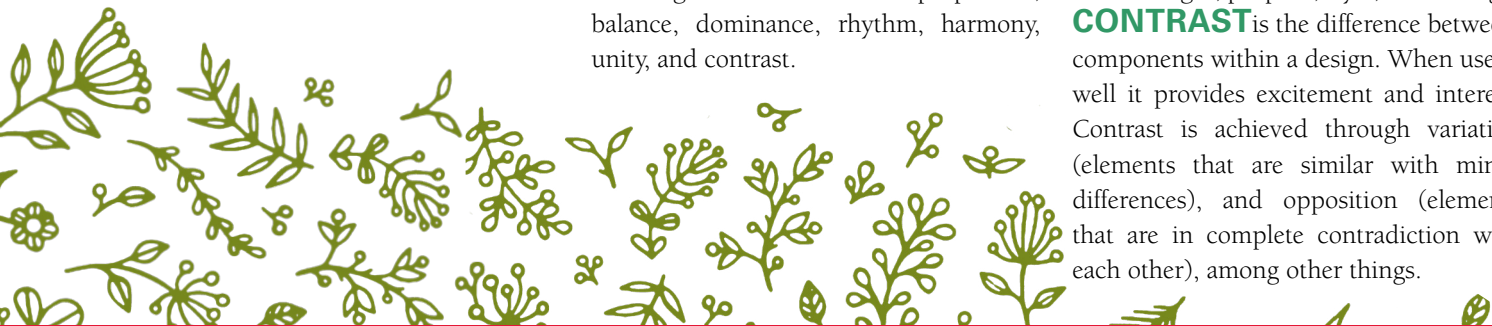
DOMINANCE is the emphasis of one or more components in the design. It utilizes things like focal points or accents to draw attention or enhance interest in specific areas of the design.

RHYTHM is the visual movement through the design. It is exhibited in several ways including repetition of design elements, the placement of components at different levels (called depth), and the gradual change or transition of design elements within the design (such as small to large, light to dark, or smooth to rough).

HARMONY is a quality that is created when all the components of the design interact in a pleasing way.

UNITY is the oneness that is created when the blend of components all have the same thought, purpose, style, and feeling.

CONTRAST is the difference between components within a design. When used well it provides excitement and interest. Contrast is achieved through variation (elements that are similar with minor differences), and opposition (elements that are in complete contradiction with each other), among other things.



Preparing for the Show

After you know the show date and location, you'll want to read the fair book or flower show rules. The earlier you read them, the more time you'll have to find answers and ensure you understand what is expected. Many shows ask for preregistration by a certain date. The rules also will state the time when floral arrangements need to be at the show site.

Judging Criteria for Floral Arrangements

Most judges use a point scale that includes categories or criteria with a specific number of points for each. The number of points per category often varies by class, but the total is usually 100. Some judges and flower shows will complete a physical scorecard. Other judges will simply use a sample scorecard to determine the weight certain factors should carry when evaluating the exhibit. See page four for a sample scorecard.

SUITABILITY OF MATERIALS & RELATION TO CONTAINER

The containers and other non-floral elements included in or alongside the arrangement should be appropriate for the exhibit class.

- Materials used with the flowers should not decay, mold, or otherwise distract or shorten the life of the arrangement.
- Materials used should complement and enhance the arrangement, not distract.

- Containers should not be too big or too small. They must be adequately sized to hold the arrangement without easily tipping and appropriately sized to provide enough water for the stems.

DISTINCTION & ORIGINALITY

Creative, innovative, unique, and imaginative designs will score higher than more common or mundane designs.

- Unique and imaginative designs must still be well executed and have good harmony, design, balance, and proportion.

CONDITION The arrangement should be in prime condition with no faded, wilted, or damaged blooms, foliage, or other elements.

- Each bloom should be at its ideal stage of development at the time of judging.

CONSTRUCTION The arrangement should be sturdy and well-assembled.

- Flower stems should not easily fall out or tip over.
- Mechanical aids like floral foam, frogs, or tape should not be visible.

Planning & Exhibiting

Read the fair book or flower show rules and be sure your arrangement meets all the criteria for the class in which it is exhibited. Most flower shows have specific sizes, themes, or elements that must be included to be exhibited in that class.

SELECT THE BEST Whether flowers are from your garden or a commercial source such as a florist, ensure they are of the highest quality. If you can see something wrong with one of your flowers, the judge will see it too.

- When harvesting from your own garden, always cut the stem several inches longer than necessary to allow for later trimming.
- Use a clean, sharp knife to make a smooth, even cut. Scissors tend to pinch the ends of the stems and close off the water-conducting vessels.
- Remove any leaves on the stem that will be in water. Foliage covered with water will rot and cause discolored water and stem blockage. Blocked stems cannot supply needed water to the living flower and make the exhibit deteriorate more rapidly.

CONDITIONING or hardening is the process used to extend the life of the cut flower in the arrangement.

- Re-cut the stems after getting them home. A new clean cut opens vessels for water uptake.
- Place stems in a clean container. Store the container and flowers in a refrigerator set at 35° to 40°F for 3 to 12 hours. Cooling permits the plant to take up more water than it releases and helps hold flower freshness.
- Never store flowers in a refrigerator with fresh fruits or vegetables; they release ethylene gas which will reduce the vase life of the flowers.
- If possible, fresh cuts on woody stems, such as roses, should be made underwater so that air does not fill the exposed vessels and block water uptake.
- Floral preservatives can be added to the water to extend the vase life of cut flowers. Commercial preservatives are available from florist shops, hobby stores, or garden centers. Placing an aspirin or penny in the water or any other homemade method is ineffective as a floral preservative.



RHYTHM can be achieved by repeating elements like color throughout the design. The repetition of the roses up this arrangement creates rhythm.



ASSEMBLING THE ARRANGEMENT

Create the arrangement 12 to 36 hours before the show to allow enough time to assemble but minimal time for blooms to fade, wilt, or change.

- Always re-cut the stems just before placing the stem in the arrangement.
- When assembling vase arrangements, consider a floral frog or placing a gridwork of tape over the opening to keep stems upright and in place. When complete, the tape or frog should not be visible. Refer to picture of frog and taped vase on the next page.
- For arrangements utilizing floral foam (i.e., Oasis):
 - Secure the foam block to the container to keep it stable.
 - If the stem is inserted and removed from the foam, re-cut the end before reinserting. Stems reinserted without cutting are more likely to have blocked water-conducting vessels.
 - Utilize flowers and greens to completely mask or cover up the foam block. When complete, it should not be visible from any side.
- When constructing arrangements, start by placing greens (leaves or foliage) to create a base and cover most of the mechanics. Then place focal point flowers. Finish by adding other blooms (and more greens, if necessary).
- Double-check to ensure all necessary elements are included. Most floral design classes have specific sizes, styles, shapes, colors, themes, flower types, container types, and elements that must be included or followed.

TRANSPORT CAREFULLY Damage frequently occurs to flowers and arrangements while transporting them to the fair.

- Partially fill vases or containers to prevent spilling, then top off the water before exhibiting.
- Place arrangements in large containers or boxes and stabilize the container with cardboard spacers, newspapers, packing peanuts, or other filler materials to prevent movement.
- Ensure blooms do not come in contact with the side of the box or other items in the vehicle during transportation to prevent damage to delicate petals or buds.
- Consider wrapping the arrangement gently in tissue paper to help protect it from sunlight, drafts, and bruising.

LABEL CORRECTLY Most flower shows will require a list of species included in the arrangement.

- Clearly label each specimen with its common name, scientific name, and variety or cultivar.
- The common name is the name commonly used for the plant and can vary by region, country, or language. Plants may have one or several commonly known names. The same common name may refer to two different plants. Some plants, such as zinnia or hosta, have the same common and scientific name.
- The scientific name (or botanical name) is the universal name given to a plant. Each plant has only one scientific name that consists of two words. The first word is always capitalized and identifies the plant's genus. The second word is the specific epithet and is not capitalized. The scientific name is underlined (when handwritten) or printed in italics.
- A variety is a variation of a plant species in color, size, shape, or other attribute. A cultivar is the cultivated variety of a plant and was developed through a controlled breeding or hybridizing program. Single quote marks indicate a cultivar name, such as *Zinnia angustifolia* 'Crystal White.' Not all garden plants have a variety or cultivar name designated.
- When purchased from a florist, the judge understands that the cultivar or variety may not be known. At minimum the common and scientific name should be provided.
- Correct and complete labeling helps make your exhibit a teaching tool for others.
- Judges may place an exhibit lower if it is not labeled or labeled incorrectly.



DOMINANCE is expressed through something like a focal point which draws attention to a specific area. The large rose in this arrangement creates a strong focal point.



Designs with appropriate **PROPORTION** have the size of the flower arrangement in good relation to the size of the container. This arrangement is too small for the container and is therefore out of proportion.



Tips for Exhibiting Flower Arrangements

- Follow the show guidelines.
- The overall effect of the arrangement should be pleasing to the eye. Color, space, texture, and shape are important.
- Use high-quality plant materials without wilting, color fading, or obvious damage. The condition of individual flowers and foliage is less important than when they are exhibited separately.
- Create arrangements that are well-balanced and do not appear to tilt to either side. Consider individual flowers' visual "weight" and arrange them so both sides appear equal.
- Plant materials should be proportionate to each other and the container. The length of stems and the size of flowers and foliage affect overall proportion.



A **FLOWER FROG** or **GRIDWORK** of tape on top of a vase can be used to help hold stems in place.

- Avoid using containers that detract from the plant materials.
- Pay attention to construction details. Insert plant materials so the foam or other material used to hold stems is not visible. If the design is intended to be viewed from only one side, fill the back side with foliage so it looks finished.



BALANCE can be achieved with both asymmetrical (left) and symmetrical (right) designs.

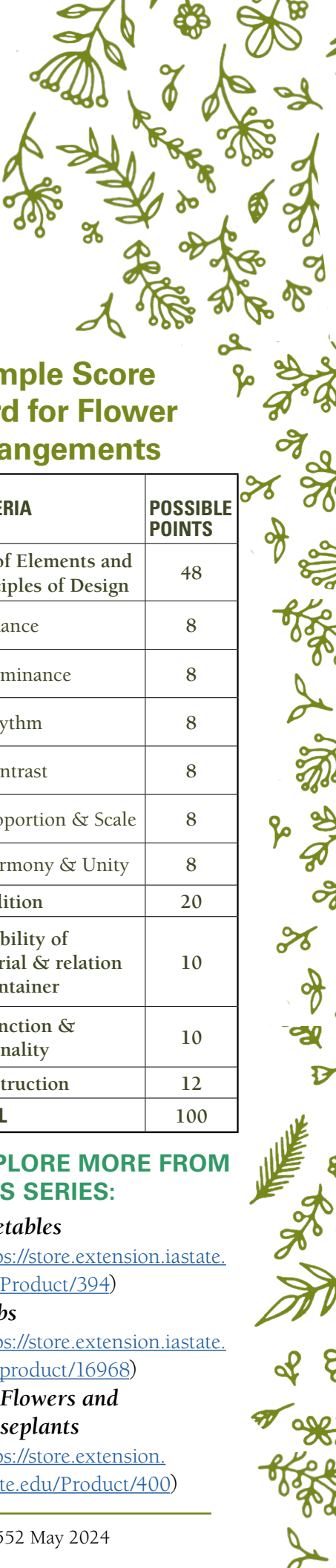
Resources

Additional information on cut flowers and floral arrangements is available from local ISU Extension offices and the following ISU sources.

- Extension Store <https://store.extension.iastate.edu> 515-294-5247
- Yard and Garden Website <https://yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu>
 - Check this site for links to horticulture newsletters, care and how-to articles, FAQs, and other resources related to gardening in Iowa.
- Iowa 4-H <https://extension.iastate.edu/4H> 515-294-1018
- Plant and Insect Diagnostic Clinic <https://yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu/pidc>
 - pidc@iastate.edu 515-294-0581

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Sample Score Card for Flower Arrangements

CRITERIA	POSSIBLE POINTS
Use of Elements and Principles of Design	48
Balance	8
Dominance	8
Rhythm	8
Contrast	8
Proportion & Scale	8
Harmony & Unity	8
Condition	20
Suitability of material & relation to container	10
Distinction & Originality	10
Construction	12
TOTAL	100

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