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We have not progressed
much?!

Walkers

Books

Guide can be a tonic for drooping bouquets

By Amalie Adler Ascher

Baltimore Sun

If you've ever picked flowers, arranged them carefully, and then watched them wilt within a day or two, you've probably been tempted to toss them in the trash and forevermore leave flower arranging to florists.

But Jeanne Hook Baetjer wasn't discouraged so easily. When she saw flowers fading, she set about looking for solutions and turned her findings into a handy little guide, "Fitness for Flowers."

Solutions — the watery kinds — are, in fact, the key to prolonging the life of cut flowers, and in her book, Baetjer offers quite a few recipes for them.

The basic one that's used for most flowers and greens contains a tablespoon of sugar and a drop or two of bleach to a gallon of warm — or, in the case of roses, very hot — water.

The sugar, Baetjer says, is nutritious, replenishing the energy lost by flowers or leaves when severed

from their roots. And warm water is absorbed more quickly by stems than cold water.

The best tonic for tulips and clematis is a shot of gin in the water. The reason is a mystery, but Baetjer supposes the boost to their vitality has to do with alcohol's sugar content.

In any case, a little gin makes the stems of tulips stand straighter (they're notorious for lounging over the edge of a pail), increasing the life of the blooms by at least a couple of days. And it helps clematis last for as long as two weeks.

Amaryllis seems to need a dose of smelling salts to pull it through the trauma of being picked; therefore, add a teaspoon of ammonia (the household kind) to its water.

Carnations perk up when infused with a bit of boric acid, while hydrangeas benefit from a little vinegar. Glycerin, wood alcohol, hydrochloric acid and peppermint oil are other additives that help to bolster the longevity of various kinds of flower and foliage.

Baetjer is renowned for her skill with flowers, particularly the art of composing mass arrangements, but it was her involvement in several local organizations that led her to put her expertise in print.

Fellow members of the Green Spring Valley Garden Club had been urging her to write down her methods for years. She finally did — more or less — by putting it all down in 75 ring-binder notebooks as her contribution one year to St. Thomas' Church for its Christmas sale.

The books sold out in no time flat, but no amount of pleading could persuade Baetjer to make any more. It was only after she hit on the idea of using a new and expanded version to add dollars to the Irvine Natural Science Center's treasury that she took up the project again. Baetjer serves on the center's board and from the time of the institution's founding in 1974 up until last year had been its president. All proceeds from the book's sale will help support the center.

The present edition, published by

the center, contains instructions for gaining the longest vase life for 228 plants, which have been categorized under the headings of Garden and Foliage Plants, Trees, Vine and Shrubs, and Wild Flowers. The book is illustrated with line drawings by Joyce Herbst, an artist for the National Aquarium in Baltimore.

Besides her talent as an arranger, Baetjer is quite a horticulturist, her elaborate garden in Garrison containing many of the plants about which she writes. She's also an ardent conservationist; thus she's particularly concerned about the treatment and care of wild flowers. To avoid picking any on the endangered or protected list, she carries in her car as an aid to identification, the Eastern Region edition of "The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Wildflowers," edited by William A. Niering and Nancy C. Olmstead.

To order a copy of "Fitness for Flowers," send a check for \$9 (which includes postage) to the Irvine Natural Science Center, Dept. SS, St. Timothy's School, Stevenson, Md. 21153.

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