Hot weather floral art

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Summer flower arranging is a problem for the country housewife who is restricted to a few shrubs and pot plants. This article presents some ideas to help overcome the difficulty.

At this time of the year when heat beats the flowers and normal flower arrangements last such a short time, it is necessary to look around for something different.

It is surprising how effective such things as reeds, foliage alone, succulents, dry branches and bark can be. Forget about the big bowls of spring flowers, and in this season aim for smaller, unusual or interesting arrangements. Build an arrangement around only one flower, or perhaps an uncommon container, and try some modern arrangements with only a few stems and eye-catching accessories.

Novelty Arrangements

For an unusual, "conversation piece" arrangement, try using anything but an ordinary flower vase or bowl. Novelty containers such as animals pulling carts or little men holding baskets are themselves amusing, and well suited to the simple "unsophisticated" flowers like daisies, phlox, nasturtiums, etc., whereas the same containers would detract from the beauty of flowers such as roses and gladioli.

These novelty vases can often be filled with just foliage, such as coprosma, common coleus or the variegated-leaved geranium. This type of "arrangement" is easily done, lasts well, and needs little attention. As a rule, the more interesting, colourful or unusual the container, the simpler should be the floral material.

A single bloom (full rose, camelia, or cactus flower) or three or four small flowers (daisies, phlox or Japanese fuchsia) can float in a little water in a brandy balloon, "witch" bowl, aqua bowl, or large goblet. A roll of plasticine can make a water-holding recess in a large pearl shell—and you can place a rose or hibiscus or other flower and a leaf or two to complete the picture. A small teapot, sugar basin or ginger jar can make an effective table decoration with a few succulents, variegated-leaves or miniature-ivy trails. Other novelty containers are an old hurricane lantern or lamp, box iron, coffee pot, hollow and suitably lined logs of wood, boots or straw hat.

If an article will not hold water perhaps it will hide a jar or tin. A cane container—say, a small basket or cage—or even a fishing creel can hide a jar of water, in which daisies, phlox, flowers from shrubs such as oleander, broom, hibiscus or
cotoneaster and nasturtiums and pansies can be arranged. In early summer the last pansies before the plant is pulled can be used—leave them on the main stem. Nasturtiums too, are easier to arrange if the main stem is used. The plant continues to grow and buds to open. Single flower stems can be used as “fillers” and removed when faded, without interfering with the rest of the arrangement, which will last a week or two more.

Another novelty container is a gourd or pumpkin. Take a dried gourd or small pumpkin, find a position in which it will sit flat without danger of tipping, then cut a small circle from the top. Take out the inside pulp and seeds and either paint or varnish it inside and out. Make sure that surfaces are sealed, as when wet it may leak and the gourd can develop an unpleasant odour. A white or light grey colour would be most useful, although if you have several a bright red and a black may also be effective. Use this gourd container for simple arrangements of white daisies or the evergreen long-lasting coprosma leaves. A little crumpled chicken wire inside will help hold stems in position.

Take care that a novelty arrangement suits its surroundings—for example, a lacquered boot filled with geraniums would be out of place on a polished table, yet it would suit a patio or sunroom. A delicate white gardenia in a fine goblet would suit a dressing table or coffee table, but be too fragile-looking for kitchen or on a cane verandah table.

**Rushes Arrangement**

Collect several bulrushes or yangets and reeds. With plasticine or floral clay, fix a needlepoint holder to one side of a fairly flat oval or oblong dish (an ovenproof casserole dish will do). Sort the rushes, keeping the smallest for the longest stem, and shorten the others to varying lengths keeping the thickest rush for the shortest stem. Impale the bulrushes on the holder, keeping stems almost vertical, making the group look as natural as possible—five, or even three, may be enough. Fix a few reeds among them, again varying the lengths. This forms the basis of the arrangement, or “picture.” All those long lines naturally draw the eye down to the “ground level.”
or holder, which is the position for the focal point or special piece of interest on which the eye can dwell. Try some circular shaped leaves (like water lily, nasturtium or geranium) to contrast with the long narrow reed and rush lines, or add, perhaps, a bunch of watercress or one or two plastic water lilies or even a toy duck or china swan, or dwarf (but keep sizes in proportion). A few pebbles will complete the picture.

If you have access to a swamp or creek, look for other water weeds to make a similar pictorial arrangement. The rushes arrangement can look very effective in conjunction with the wall decoration of ducks in flight, if you have them. Make it appear that they are flying down towards the rushes.

**Dry Arrangements**

When dry, reeds and rushes can be “dressed up” to make decorations for Christmas or a special celebration. Use a flat white paint (or Christmas “snow”) and pale blue and silver or pale pink and gold. Spray or paint the reeds and bullrushes, also a few fronds of dry bracken fern. (To keep dry bracken fern flat, pick it when it has just turned brown and before it curls, place between newspaper under a weight or under the corner of a carpet or lino square until thoroughly dry). If you wish, sprinkle a little glitter on the tips of the reeds or fern (not on everything—leave some plain to make a contrast). Arrange the reeds and fern on a needle holder in a suitable container, or in a mound of plasticine or firmly mixed “spackle.” Use the reeds and rushes as the tall material, and the fern as the medium material, as described before. For a focal point, use either holly, bright Christmas baubles or bells, or pine cones for Christmas, or artificial fruit, pink and white sugar almonds, or gaily wrapped sweets or bon bons for other occasions.

Tall dried and painted wheat ears, shorter stems of oats, “blowfly grass” or bracken fern and a small bunch of gum-nuts or Cape lilac (white cedar) berries or dried head of hydrangea could be placed similarly to make a dainty, unusual...
decoration. Both of these dry arrangements would look doubly effective on a mirror.

Keep on the look out for twisty pieces of old wood, interesting dry branches, gumnuts, and natural novelties to use in dry arrangements. Quite an effective dry arrangement can be made with heads from different banksias—some long and slim, others short and fat, grouped together and stuck on to a piece of banksia bark. Twisted dry hibbertia roots, everlastingings and bracken pieces make interesting ornaments.

The two different types of dock can be used, either dry or painted. As with previous arrangements, have no more than three different textures or types of plant growth. Two would be sufficient if one material is particularly interesting. Try arranging the angular spreading dock with some candlewick rushes or dry Watsonia spikes and a bunch of gumnuts or some banksia heads. Try a large dry spiky pomegranate, or boxthorn branch or even a well shaped lupin plant (trimmed where necessary) with the more graceful drooping gumleaves, bracken or zamia frond, and a handful of zamia nuts or jacaranda or kurrajong seed cases, or some bunched everlastingings or Morrison at the focal point.

Collect some blackboy straws, both curved and straight and dry creeper stems with interesting twists such as wisteria or snail creeper. Loquat leaves are also very useful. Dry bullrush reeds can be curved by gently pulling over the fingers—try using two straight and one or three curved in the rushes arrangement. Straight bamboo stems, and pruning from fruit trees—be selective and trim where necessary—also have many possibilities. In fact, the less you have in the way of a conventional garden and cut flowers, the more you will find can be done with dry material.

Try not to let the taller or darker materials overpower the rest of the arrangement, either in visual weight (darker, thicker things look heavy) or in interest value. The heavy-looking things like a varnished knotty piece of tree root or thick banksia "nut," need to be placed low in an arrangement. If you have a particularly attractive piece of driftwood, use it alone or with just a little of another material or greenery, or with a pot plant.

Dry driftwood material can be used "au naturel" or bleached (scrub then soak in laundry bleach) painted, varnished, or polished (shoe polish imparts a soft attractive shine). A mixture of natural, painted and polished materials can be used, making contrasts with surfaces as well as textures and forms of growth. Or, if desired, have one fresh or green item in a dry arrangement or use some bright geraniums or a growing plant at the focal point. All dry arrangements can be held in plasticine or "spackle," but make some arrangement for water for any fresh material—a small container like a pill bottle or test tube can be embedded in the foundation and hidden by some foliage or flower head. Display your arrangement on a straw mat or wooden stand.

Making the Most of One Bloom

Take one yellow rose (or the last two or three flowers on an almost spent gladiolus spike and spread the effect of the colour by arranging it as the point of interest in an all-yellow vase. Place two
or three small twigs of golden privet in a slim brass or gilt vase, place several pieces of broom, heads at different levels, in front of the privet then position the rose with one or two leaves almost on the rim of the vase, near the centre.

One or two red or pink flowers can be treated in the same way. In a wider vase or small bowl put a background of two or three red-toned canna leaves. Soften the outline with some smaller red leaves—the new leaves of the rose or the heavenly bamboo (*Nandina domestica*) or even new red-gum shoots. Then place the red bloom or two with some leaves on the near-centre front. The oleander flower stems, stripped of leaves and opened flowers, can be used massed to give a pink fern-like background. Other reddish-hued leaves, seed heads and weeds can be used, but use only two or three different textures in the one arrangement, and keep similar things together to avoid a mixed-up cluttered appearance.

A white bloom can be “made much of” by using it as the centre piece of an all-white arrangement. Use daisies or other medium-sized white flowers as the second texture, and fill in with the fine “Queen Anne’s lace” or the whitish wild “shivery grass.” Use a white or green container. A background of green leaves may be needed for a vase, or used as a base in a wide mouthed bowl or white china tureen.

Investigate the leaves of pot plants with an eye to using their colour to complement another—the back of the leaves of the “Moses” plant and some marantas have a deep pink colour, and some begonias and variegated ivy show a pink tint when light shines through—these would look effective in front of a window.

**Arrangement with Succulents**

A rock garden or potted succulents will supply material for an artistic arrangement that will last several weeks, or at least it will provide the basis of an arrangement which needs merely a fresh focal point now and again. Another advantage is that when one is tired of an arrangement, most of the pieces can be replanted, to continue growing until
needed again. Invest in a needle-point holder—they are invaluable for "few stem" arrangements like these.

Take two pieces of "mother-in-law's tongue," cutting a narrow piece fairly long and a wider piece a few inches shorter. Impale these on a needle point holder (fixed with plasticine just off-centre in an oval or oblong dish). Add three single stems of jade, in varying lengths shorter than the first leaves, then fix the focal point low in front to hide the pin holder. This focal point can be a "rosette" of "hen and chickens" or "elephant's tongue" or any other succulent of circular formation. If some of the holder is still visible at the sides, hide it with two small pieces of sago plant, placed almost horizontally.

Stand back and look at your arrangement. It should look balanced. Experiment with the stem lengths and the angles at which you place them. Imagine a vertical line through the centre of the dish and if one side looks too heavy or too short in comparison with the other, shorten stems and alter angles until visual balance is achieved. Then add water and place in position.

Vary this arrangement by using a different low material—some variegated geranium or similar leaves, for example; the shape should contrast effectively with the lines of the first two materials. The bright kalanchoe flowerhead (which lasts for several weeks), leaves or flowers from the "tree of life," or a bunch of silvery-grey foliage (from saltbush or succulents) or even a plastic flower are alternatives. The bright orange fungus that forms on fallen logs could be used here (if dry and losing colour, simply dampen with water), or perhaps some interesting stones or a painted or varnished pine cone, banksia nut, or a small, suitable ornament.

Experiment with other tall and medium materials too, but use only three or four different types or textures (for example, long and slim, shorter, bunched, daintier, and low and solid). If you really want to use that little sitting chinaman ornament, remove one of the shorter stems of plant material. When considering adding to such an arrangement, a good motto is "when in doubt, leave it out."
Pomegranate Arrangement

A pomegranate arrangement is effective for a special occasion, although it is not so long-lasting. If you do not mind reducing your crop of fruit, cut several old wood pieces with flowers and buds. (New shoots droop too quickly). To avoid a very bushy green background dotted occasionally with flowers, trim away most of the shoots beyond the flowers on each stem, and reduce by half the number of side branches and leaf bunches. Place on a needleholder in a flat dish, or in a bowl, so that buds and smaller flowers are to the outside and the larger flowers are lower and more central. Do not attempt to "arrange" too much—the straight stiff stems cannot be coaxed into graceful lines and it is better to let them show their "cragginess." For this reason, use only a few stems. As the soft petals wither, gently pull them away, leaving the bright calyx to remain just as effective for another couple of days.

A startling modern arrangement with pomegranate can be made with just one tall grey, dry branch, a small green one (trim where necessary to show its angles) and a short stem with one or two flowers or later in the summer one or two fruit (differing sizes). Place on a needleholder in a modern, flat black dish, and echo the colour by placing a book, record cover or magazine with the same colour nearby.

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