Floral Arranging...On The Wild Side

Tim Latimer, Spring 2010
How to make your wild flowers last longer

• Harvest flowers at 1/3 to ½ open stage; fully open flowers will not last as long and you will not be able to enjoy watching them open.

• The best time to harvest flowers is early in the morning.

• Flowers are the most hydrated at this time.
Harvesting flowers

• Take a bucket with you when harvesting flowers
• Place stems in fresh water as soon as they are cut
• After you have harvested your flowers its time to condition them
Conditioning flowers

• Remove the lower foliage that would be below the water level
• Re-cut the flower stems
• Place in a floral preservative solution
• Allow to stand in the preservative solution for 2-3 hours before arranging
• This “Conditioning” period will hydrate the flowers and extend flower life up to 200%
Floral preservatives

• Floral preservatives contain:
  – Acid….lower the pH to 3.5
    – Flowers take up water much faster at a low pH
  – Sugar
    – sugar is the natural product of photosynthesis…so it is in effect flower “food”
  – Biocide
    – Prevents bacterial growth which will clog stem tissues and prevent water uptake
Mixing preservative solution

• Commercially available flower preservatives come in small packets with flower purchases
• Read the directions
• A 5 gram packet will only make up 2 cups of preservative
• Incorrectly measured preservatives will do more harm than good
Make your own preservative

- 2 cups lemon lime soda, 2 cups water, 1 tsp bleach
- 4 cups water, 2 Tbsp sugar, 2 Tbsp lemon juice, 1 tsp bleach
- 4 cups water, 2 tbsp sugar, 2 Tbsp vinegar, 1 tsp bleach
Cutting stems

• When re-cutting stems for conditioning use a sharp knife or sharp shears.
• It is not necessary to cut stems at an angle but it will make a point for easy insertion into floral foam
• Contrary to old information never crush stems...even woody stems
Wildflowers (weeds?)

- There are many wildflowers in MI that are useful in floral design
- Some may be considered weeds but are quite beautiful
- And the price is right!
- Not all are native to MI….some non-native species are great for floral design if not for the environment.
Dried wild flowers

• Many wild flowers are more useful in design when dried
• Flowers are harvested, bundled into manageable bunches with rubber bands, and hung upside-down in a dark place
• Some flowers may be harvested from fields in the dry state
Swamp Milkweed  
*Asclepias incarnata*

- Blooms July – Aug
- Found in wet areas
- Makes a great dried material
- Harvest pods after the seeds have dispersed
Purple Loosestrife
*Lythrum salicaria*

- Blooms June – Sept
- Found in wet areas
- Invasive species so cut without remorse
- Red violet flowers are quite long lasting
Blazing star
*Litarris spicata*

- Blooms August to October
- Found in dry prairie areas
- Flowers from top of the spike down
Cutleaf Coneflower
*Rudbeckia lacinata*

- Plants up to 9 feet tall
- Blooms July to September
- Thrives in heavy soil, woodland edges, riverbanks
Prairie coneflower, yellow coneflower

*Ratibida pinnata*

- Blooms June to September
- Found in prairies, fields, open woods
- ½ to 4 feet tall
- Also useful dried
New England Aster

*Aster novae-angliae*

- Blooms early September to October
- 1 – 7 feet tall
- Shades of pink and purple
- Found in fields, wet spots, thickets
Teasel

*Dipsacus sylvestris*

- Blooms July to October
- 2 – 6 feet tall
- Found commonly in pastures, roadsides, construction areas
- Non native, imported from Europe by wool industry...were used to "tease" the wool cloth
- Excellent dried
Common Milkweed

*Asclepias syriaca*

- Blooms June to August
- 2 – 5 feet tall
- Roadsides, dry fields, gravelly soil
- Bad flower great dried
Black –eyed Susan
*Rudbeckia hirta*

- Blooms June – October
- 1-3 feet tall
- Roadsides, fields, construction areas
- Dried flower heads are useful as well
Queen-Anne’s lace

*Daucus carota*

- Blooms June – September
- Everywhere!
- Long lasting if conditioned properly
- Nice dried material
Common Cattail

*Typha latifolia*

- Bloom begins in May
- Found in marshes and shallow water
- Fresh cats may be used at any stage of development
- Harvest green for drying
Curled Dock
*Rumex crispus*

- Blooms in late spring to early fall.
- 1-4 feet tall.
- May be picked all summer for a range of color:
  - Yellow
  - Green
  - Honey
  - Pink
  - Black
  - Brown
- Excellent dried material.
Blue Vervain

*Verbena hastata*

- Blooms July – September
- 1-5 feet tall
- Common, found on roadsides, thickets, shores
- Excellent dried and fresh
Goldenrod

*Solidago sp.*

- Over 60 species in the U.S. so very difficult to distinguish one form another
- Blooms July – September
- Harvest and dry as soon as they bloom for yellow flowers
- Later harvest makes for fuzzy flowers
Purple coneflower
Echinacea purpurea

- Blooms June to October
- 2-3 feet tall
- Open dry woods, prairies, dry fields
- Dried “cones” are attractive
Multiflora Rose
Rosa multiflora

- Blooms May – June
- Invasive so pick all you want
- Imported from China
- Harvest hips in September-October