

Mick Waters introduces Julie Warburton and

# Teaching with flowers

For a blooming curriculum



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# The seeds of a blooming curriculum

You have probably picked up this book because you are looking for another way to help children learn, or perhaps you want to try something different, or maybe you love flowers and are intrigued about how you could teach many aspects of the curriculum through such an enchanting medium, or maybe it's a mix of all these things. Whatever your reason, and hopefully you are now reading your own copy, your pupils will thank you for it.

*Teaching with flowers for a blooming curriculum* has grown out of my own experience. I had been a teacher for many years, as well as a transition and literacy consultant, when I was given the chance to retrain as a florist. I then thought, 'What now?' There seemed to be a natural affinity between the two worlds, with the opportunity to use flowers to open the doors of the curriculum to children, so I decided to put together my knowledge of flowers and teaching. The blooming curriculum was born.

Initially, I was invited to work in schools to give children the experience of flower arranging and, to prevent it being a one-off event, I made links to what they were doing in many of the subjects across the curriculum. Gradually things became more structured, and the suggestions in this book come from the work I've done with children in classrooms and schools to help their curriculum bloom.

Teachers find that children's understanding of quite complex knowledge becomes much clearer when they take part in practical workshops. Most noticeable is the way that vocabulary is used by pupils as they explain their work. Teachers also tell me that they are impressed with the way children work in teams and that poor behaviour is rarely an issue. Even the most 'difficult' pupil seems to behave gently when given a delicate flower to work with.

I thoroughly enjoy doing workshops with children, teachers and parents, and the pride in the finished product is matched with the satisfaction of seeing learning taking place while people are at work.

This book is aimed at those who teach children aged 9 to 12 years. It offers an approach into an exciting and hands-on way of learning that captures children's imaginations by working with flowers, the most beautiful of natural materials.



## Part 2

# About flowers

Flowers are great – their colour, shape, scent and feel. I just love them and so do children. The only drawback to cut flowers is that once they have been removed from the main plant they are goners.

One way you can help your flowers look lovely for longer is to give them a little tender loving care on the day you purchase them, called 'care and conditioning' in the floristry trade.

## Chapter 3

# Care and conditioning for cut flowers

### You will need:

1–4 good size buckets  
(depending on the number  
of flowers you have)

Floristry scissors

Secateurs for tough, woody  
stems

Stem stripper (optional)

Fill your buckets with about 20 cm of water and add flower food if appropriate. Using your stem stripper or hands (this is my preference as it gives you more control and causes less damage to the stem – thorny roses are my only exception), remove any leaves that would sit below the water line so that around two-thirds of the stem is naked.

Cut the ends of each stem at a 45 degree angle (make sure you cut between the nodes on carnations as they will not be able to take up water if cut on the node). This widens the surface area of the stem and allows the flower to draw up more water. Place the flowers immediately into the water, taking care not to overcrowd them.

Keep the buckets in a cool, dark location until you are ready to use the flowers. I recommend you do this the day before you begin arranging as it will give the flowers plenty of time to hydrate.

These are the general care and conditioning requirements of flowers, but some are fussier than others. If in doubt, consult a florist, website or a book (*Cut Flowers: A Practical Guide to their Selection and Care* by Su Whale





is easily available, as is the excellent reference book edited by Vanessa Gilbert, *Foliage for Florists*).

## Some useful tips

To encourage flowers to open, place them in a light, warm place. You can add more water to your buckets, but make sure there are no leaves below the waterline.

Removing more leaves also encourages the buds to open as the water and nutrients are feeding the flowers rather than trying to support the leaves. Remove additional leaves if your flowers are looking particularly dehydrated. I tend to do this with chrysanthemums as they can spend a lot of time out of water before you buy them.

Keep your cut flowers away from fruits that produce ethylene gas, which some flowers are not very fond of.

Change the water every day until you are ready to use them in your arrangement. In this way, you avoid any bacterial growth that could affect the life of your flowers.

## Chapter 4

# The principles and elements of flowers and floral design

Before you embark on your wonderful floral journey, you might find it useful and interesting to understand some of the principles and elements of floristry. These should enhance rather than inhibit your creativity. Consider and experiment with these ideas, focus on one more than another or use them to talk about your final design.

Don't forget to pass on these nuggets of learning to the children!

## Principles of design

### Rhythm

Rhythm refers to the flow of the flowers within an arrangement, creating a sense of movement and encouraging the eye of the beholder to move around the design and linger. Rhythm is achieved by placement (lines, groupings and patterns); repetition of flower (focal, transitional, fillers), colour (tints, tones, shades and hues) or form (rounds, spears, spray/flat); and transition or gradation of flower size, colour or form.

## Balance

There are two aspects to the principle of balance. The first is actual balance – will the finished arrangement be able to stand up on its own or has it been arranged with too much weight in one area so that it topples over? The second is visual balance – how pleasing and restful the design is to the eye. A design can be symmetrically or asymmetrically balanced and this is achieved through line, colour, use of space and weight of materials.

## Proportion

Proportion deals with a ratio of one thing to another – it could be colour, texture, height or flower type. Florists take heed of both Euclid and Fibonacci when considering the ratio of one area to another in a floral design.

Euclid's golden ratio, in the simplest of terms, works in thirds – whether that is volume, area or line. For example, in terms of line, the total height of an arrangement should compromise one-third container, two-thirds tallest stems, or vice versa. Another example might be the use of texture within a design: one-third smooth, two-thirds rough.

Another method of measuring good floral design proportion is to adopt 3, 5, 8, part of Fibonacci's number sequence which, fascinatingly, reflects nature's very own growth pattern. So, using the above examples, your container to arrangement height ratio will

be 3:5, or vice versa, making an overall number of 8. Rather than going for a line, you can use the Fibonacci sequence to group the flowers within your arrangement.

## Contrast

Highlighting the differences in plant materials used in your design can add depth and dimension, drawing the eye to particular key areas. You can achieve contrast through colour, shape, size and texture. Be aware, however, that a contrast that is too strong or obvious may result in a loss of harmony and visual balance. It all depends on what effect you are trying to achieve.

## Dominance

Dominance is when one element of the design is given importance – for example, the colour red may dominate or the round form of a tulip may take precedence over the line form of a genista. Dominance can be used to create focal points within your design.

## Scale

Although often used in the same breath, scale and proportion are different. While proportion deals with a ratio quantity of one thing to another, scale deals with relative size dimensions. For the purposes of floral design, flowers can be divided into three sizes: focal, transitional and fillers (or big, medium and small if you like!).

Focal blooms are your big wow flowers or those with the most eye-catching, dominant colour. Peonies, roses, lilies, gerberas, standard carnations, standard chrysanthemums, dahlias, sunflowers, anemones and proteas are just some examples.



To bridge the gap between the big focal flowers and the tiny fillers, use transitional flowers, such as spray roses, spray chrysanthemums, spray carnations, eryngiums or ranunculi.



All good things come in small packages and filler flowers can be incredibly gorgeous. Some of my favourites include waxflowers, asters, hypericum, tanacetum, genista and kangaroo paw.



Think about the scale of one flower next to the other when creating your design – big to medium or medium to small will work much better than gigantic next to tiny.

## Harmony

Harmony is the sum of all the above parts, resulting in a design where all the components work well together.

## Elements of design

The elements of design feed into your principles of design.

### Line

Lines are talked about a lot in floral design. They help to create the movement and rhythm of an arrangement, forming a path for the eye to move along – think patterns. You can place your flowers in a diagonal line, a horizontal line or a vertical line, as well as a lazy 'S' line, to attain your desired effect. More than one line in a design is also possible. You can create lines using one flower type or a group of flowers or by repeating colour.

### Form

Form relates to the shape of your final design and the shape of the floral material used within the design. I will concentrate on the latter.

In simple terms, flower shapes can be divided into three major forms: rounds, sprays and spears. Try to include a mix of two or three of these shapes to add interest to your design. Nonetheless, some very effective and stunning designs rely on using only one form or flower type. Look at some floristry magazines and the internet for ideas (see Part 4 for some ideas to get you started).



## Rounds

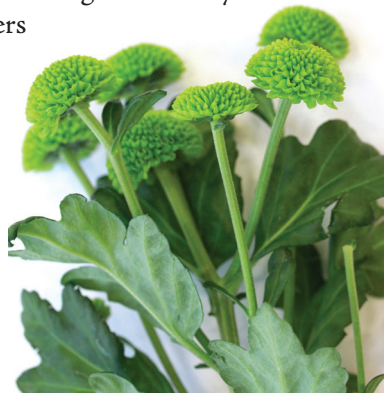


Rounds include domes, globes, flats and rosettes. The large round form flowers are generally used as the focal, or main, flower within a design. That is, they are the dominant flower that creates a centre of interest and allows the eye to rest and linger as it moves around the arrangement. Some rounds like alliums and craspedia look wonderful in modern, minimalistic designs.

Hydrangeas, roses, dahlias, peonies, tulips, gerberas, alliums, orchids, open lilies (when closed they are spears!) are some other rounds you could use.

## Spray

Spray flowers have flowering branching stems away from the main stem. The flowers are smaller in size than 'standard' flowers – that is, flowers with only one main stem (like a gerbera). Spray flowers can be used as transitionals or fillers, depending on the size of the flowers. They can



soften a design, especially the lovely fluffy ones, and add variation and interest.

Spray flowers you could use include eryngiums, waxflowers, gypsophila, spray chrysanthemums, Michaelmas daisies, spray roses, *Alchemilla mollis* and statice.

## Spears

As you can tell by the name, these are your 'pointy' flower forms. They add direction, structure, form and height, and they contrast well with round forms. Spears can help to lead the eye from the outer edges of the design to the desired focal point. They are usually made up of lots of smaller flowers on short stalks (some are even stalkless) growing up to the tip. They generally flower from the bottom up, though there are a couple of exceptions (e.g. *liatris*) which flower from the top down.



Spear shapes include veronica, delphiniums, gladioli, larkspur, stock, Canterbury bells and *eremurus*.

## Texture

When evaluating a floral design, florists consider actual texture (how the floral material feels) and visual texture (how it looks). A shiny texture makes the eye move quickly over the design, while a rougher texture will halt the eye. This is because there are generally more gradients of colour lying within a textured flower which are enhanced by differences in light. A monochromatic colour scheme with differing textures can look stunning and intriguing, as the texture can add a wonderful three-dimensional aspect to your design as well making your arrangement irresistibly tactile. You may need to add a 'Please do not touch' sign to your design!



## Colour

Colour is the diva of the elements of design! Nothing influences our moods or emotions like colour – it is usually the first aspect we respond to. Colours have symbolism, associations and connotations. They can clash, argue and fight, or they can be serene and harmonious. Whatever colour combination you choose, you will always get a response. I will cover colour in much more detail in Part 3.



## Space

Space is probably the trickiest of the elements to describe and the hardest for students of floristry to get right. I could describe the concepts of positive and negative space but, without trying to get too complicated about it, basically make sure you allow for space within your design to give an illusion of depth. This will add interest and allow the eye to rest for a while.



# Book a Blooming Curriculum Workshop

Listed below are some of the workshops which Julie can deliver in your school or organisation.

## ONE DAY WONDER

A popular starting point with schools. The One Day Wonder session can be made up of anything between 1 to 5 workshops, each workshop catering for up to 30 students. This means up to 150 children in one day could be given the wonderful opportunity to experience working with flowers.

Each workshop includes:

- Ideas and activities linked to the national curriculum for teachers to pursue with the children afterwards.
- A 'Let's learn about ...' session.
- A demonstration.
- A practical session where the children create their own floral delight to take home with them.

## THE SCHOOL FLOWER SHOW

This is a three day 'special event' that is intense and enjoyable. Children get a taste of what it might be like to work in the floristry industry as they develop their knowledge, skills and understanding in a range of subject areas whilst working towards a wonderful final floral exhibition for parents and the local community; a definite crowd pleaser.

## PROJECT FLOWERS

Project Flowers runs for a half-term and includes weekly sessions for up to five weeks. Through the course of this project children will follow a practical and imaginative curriculum devised especially for the school. Children will be encouraged to chronicle Project Flowers in a film or school blog as they develop their knowledge, skills and understanding with flowers and in a range of subject areas. There is the option of finishing Project Flowers with a wonderful final floral exhibition for parents and the local community. Deep learning with real purpose ... and inspectors will enjoy it too!

Also available:

- ❁ Curriculum specific sessions
- ❁ Staff training
- ❁ Family workshops
- ❁ Summer school
- ❁ Floristry clubs
- ❁ Careers workshops

However, Blooming Curriculum is incredibly flexible and can be adapted to suit your needs, please get in touch for more information.

Visit [bloomingcurriculum.com](http://bloomingcurriculum.com) or email [info@bloomingcurriculum.com](mailto:info@bloomingcurriculum.com)





## Have you ever tried teaching with flowers in your classroom?

If the answer is no, you have been missing out on an exciting and hands-on approach to the curriculum which captures children's imaginations and builds important skills and subject knowledge.

The challenge for teachers is to find imaginative ways to bring alive the subject matter prescribed in programmes of study. Julie Warburton has provided everything you need to get started; discover for yourself the transformative effects of teaching with flowers in this imaginative, thoughtful and beautiful book.

Stunningly illustrated, this book combines the intricate discipline of floristry with the wonder and opportunity of the classroom. The multi-sensory world of flowers is used as a living textbook to inspire and motivate children right across the curriculum.

Juno Hollyhock, Executive Director,  
Learning through Landscapes



This gloriously illustrated and clearly written book will do much to feed the souls of those many teachers who, after decades of almost exclusive emphasis on the functional and the measurable, yearn for fresh perspectives.

Dr Bill Gent, Associate Editor, *RE Today* magazine, Associate Fellow, Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit



As an enthusiastic botanist, I really hope that *Teaching with flowers* will help to raise the profile of the environmental, scientific and cultural value of plants; sowing the seeds of interest in the plant kingdom at an early age is a vital first step.

Dr Phil Gates, botanist and naturalist, @seymourdaily



Julie Warburton taught in an inner-city school, before moving on to school management. Through her work with the Black Country Challenge she has addressed the wider educational agenda as a teaching and learning consultant, working with a range of primary and secondary schools on transition and literacy. This book is the cross-pollination of her two passions: education and flowers. [bloomingcurriculum.com](http://bloomingcurriculum.com)

*Teaching with flowers* is a new addition to the 'Mick Waters introduces' series. Mick is perhaps best known as former Director of Curriculum at QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) and in this series of books he introduces a selection of the very best in practical resources for the curriculum.

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