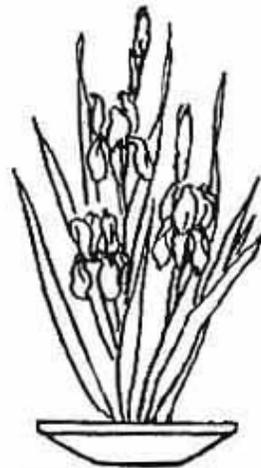


# Principles of Floral Arrangement



**This publication has been prepared by the Baxter County Master Gardeners as an introduction to floral arrangement for use in exhibiting at the Baxter County Fair**



**UofA** UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS  
DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE  
Cooperative Extension Service

## **Introduction**

Floral arrangement is the art of selecting and organizing flowers and foliage according to the elements and principles of design in order to attain a pleasing and interesting design. Arranging flowers is an artistic activity and a way to express oneself creatively; county fairs offer the flower arranger an opportunity to participate in this art form.

The following information is offered as an introduction to the basic principles of floral arrangement. This publication does not address Baxter County Fair exhibiting rules and requirements. For fair rules and requirements for exhibiting floral arrangements, see the Baxter County Fair Book and the Baxter County Master Gardener publication **Exhibiting Flowers and Plants**. Both publications are available at the Baxter County Cooperative Extension Service, 213 East 6<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 111, Mountain Home, AR 72653, (870) 425-2335.

# Principles of Floral Arrangement

## Materials

### Cutting Flowers and Foliage

Successful floral arrangement begins with fresh plant materials that have been properly handled and prepared. Beauty and good composition of an arrangement is not determined by the cost or rarity of plant materials used, but by the way they are selected, cared for and arranged.

Cut flowers and foliage the evening before the arrangement will be made to allow time for proper conditioning. Handle plant material carefully, handling only the stems.

Most flowers will keep best if cut when nearly fully open. Many tight buds or young leaves wilt rapidly and will not take up water. Some flowers will keep best if cut in the bud stage or when they are just beginning to open. Fully open or faded flowers are past prime and usually will not keep well. Experiment with various types of plant materials to determine the best stage of maturity for cutting.

Cut flowers and foliage with a sharp knife or flower shears. Cut stems on a slant to enable flowers to absorb more water. Cut stems longer than required for arrangement. Cut extra stems in case of damage.

Stand flowers and foliage in a bucket of cool water as they are cut from the garden; place indoors in a cool, dark place. Re-cut stems indoors at a 45-degree angle. Cut stems under water to prevent air from entering the stem and interfering with water uptake. Place only an inch or so of the stem under the water to cut it.

### Conditioning Plant Materials

Conditioning is an important factor in successfully arranging and exhibiting cut plant materials. The purpose of conditioning is to allow the cut plant material to absorb as much water as possible. Plant material that is not conditioned appears dried out or wilted. Do not attempt to arrange flowers that have not first been properly conditioned; plant material that has not been conditioned is easily damaged in the arrangement process. Proper conditioning will also prolong the life of the arrangement.

Stand cut plant materials in lukewarm water to a depth of half their length overnight in a cool, dark place. This allows the stem, leaves, and blossoms to absorb water to enable them to retain optimum beauty.

The next morning, cut stems again under water at a 45-degree angle. Remove all foliage below the water level of the container; submerged foliage decays, creating foul water. Leave the cut plant materials in water until ready to use them. Wait until the plant materials feel stiff before arranging them.

Some flowers with fleshy, fibrous stems such as cockscombs or sunflowers will last longer if about ½ inch of their cut ends are dipped in boiling water before being placed in a container. Woody stems should be peeled back and split to allow the stem to absorb more water. Plants that exude a milky substance should be sealed by searing the cut end, using a flame or by dipping it into powdered alum.

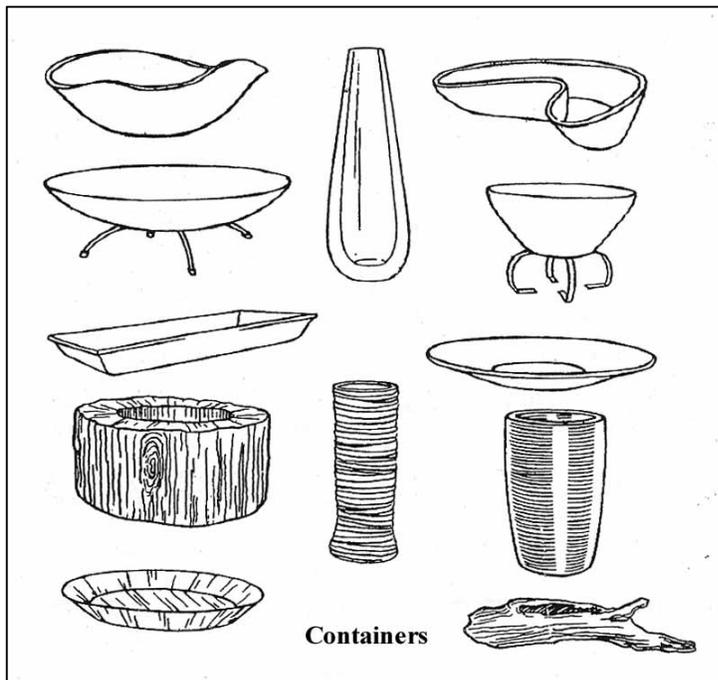
Hollow-stemmed flowers should be filled with water before being placed in a container. Holding the cut flower upside down, fill the stems with water, invert the flower holding a finger over the cut end of the stem, place in water.

Some plant material (generally foliage) will benefit from complete submersion in lukewarm water overnight. Experiment with different approaches to conditioning the flowers and foliage to be displayed to determine the best method. This will also help determine which flowers are well-suited for exhibiting.

## Containers

The container should have been thoroughly washed since its last use. Fill the container with water before beginning to arrange the plant material.

The size of the container should be in scale with the table or location where it will be used. Remember that the larger the container, the more plant material will be needed.



Suit the shape of the container to the arrangement to be made. Simple shapes are easiest to work with. Avoid ornate containers as they may detract from the floral arrangement.

Neutral colors like tan, brown, gray or greens are easy colors to harmonize with plant materials and with most backgrounds. White can be very stark and call attention to the container rather than to the arrangement. Colored containers are available, but should be used with care so as not to detract from the arrangement.

Containers come in many materials, such as glass, pottery clay, porcelain and metal. Clear glass containers are generally undesirable as the stems are visible. Containers can be thin and dainty, or thick and sturdy.

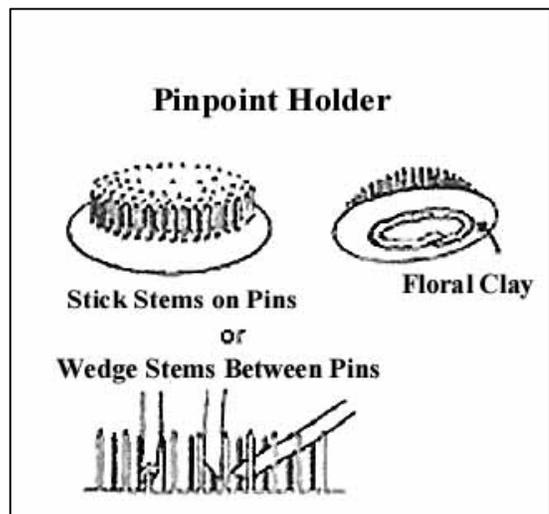
The spirit of the arrangement and the container should go together. For example, an arrangement of miniature roses would be more suited to a delicate silver vase than a bulky clay bean pot.

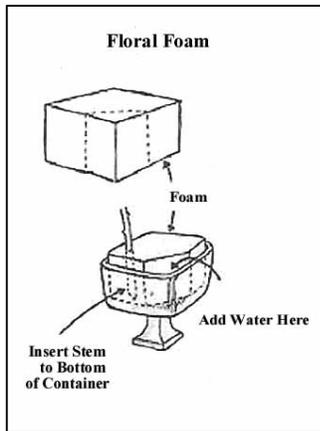
## Holder

A good holder should give the freedom to position stems where they are wanted and hold them in place securely. Choose a holder suitable for the style of arrangement planned, the plant materials to be used and the container to be used.

### Pinpoint Holders

Pinpoint holders are most often used for line and line-mass arrangements in low bowls or shallow containers. Use a waterproof floral clay to fasten the holder to the base of the container. A heavy metal pinpoint holder is easiest to keep in place in the container. Stems are either stuck directly onto the pins or are wedged between the pins. Thin stems may be placed on a pinpoint holder by binding several stems together with a rubber band, string or floral tape.





## Floral Foams

Wet floral foams such as Oasis brand hold stems in place and supply water to the flowers. Floral foams are available in wet or dry forms; wet foams are used for arranging fresh plant materials, while dry floral foam is used for dried or silk floral arrangements. Wet and dry types of floral foams are not interchangeable – their intended use is specific. Wet floral foam should not be reused because existing holes in the foam will not supply water to the stems of plant materials. Floral foam is inexpensive and may be purchased from floral supply stores, arts & crafts stores or florists. Floral foam is best used for line-mass or mass arrangements, but may be used in some line arrangements also.

Before use, soak the foam in a pail of water until it barely floats. A clear floral preservative should be added to the water to extend the freshness of the floral arrangement. Cut a piece of foam fit the container tightly and force it into place; the container should be mostly filled with the foam. Cut off a small piece of the corner of the foam so that water may be added to the arrangement later as needed. Floral tape may be used to secure the foam if needed. Fill the container with water.

Insert stems to the bottom of the foam; it is more important with heavy or large flowers that the stem be placed all the way to the bottom of the foam for added support. Do not pull a stem part way out of the foam after placing it, as this may remove the stem end from contact with the water or foam, causing the flower to wilt.

## Floral Arrangement Styles

These geometric designs - Line, Line-mass, and Mass – form the foundation of all floral designs.

### Line Arrangements

Line arrangements are adaptations of Japanese styles. Linear pattern is dominant. Line arrangements are characterized by restraint in the quantity of plant materials used, with an emphasis on the beauty of individual blooms or foliage. Line arrangements are usually bold and dramatic, with importance placed on the contrast of form and texture, with an open silhouette. Often line arrangements will have three lines or placements. Most linear arrangements have asymmetrical balance. Typically, they are viewed from the front only. Allowing some material to extend toward the front or back of the arrangement develops depth.

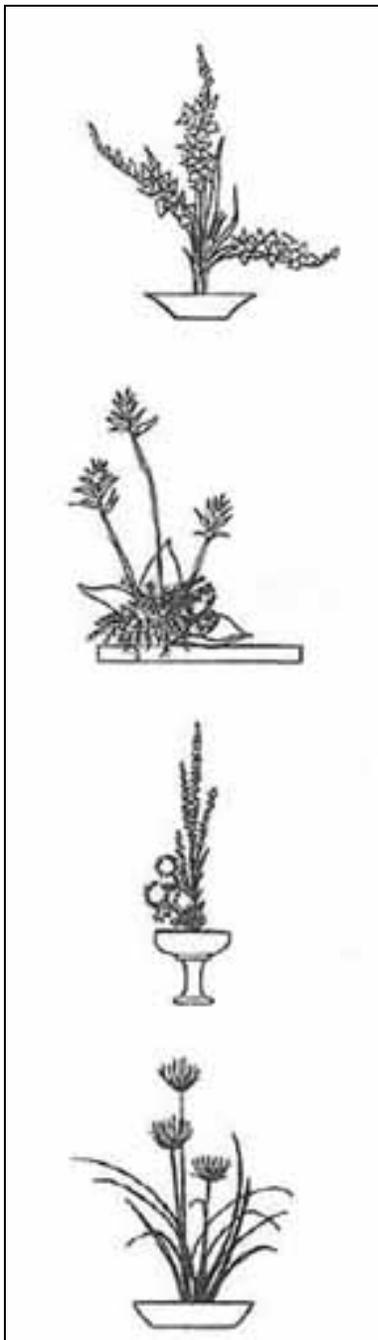
### Line-Mass Arrangements

Line-mass arrangements combine the strong line of Japanese styles with the massed effect of European designs. Line-mass arrangements have a clean, uncluttered look, with definite line, a well-defined mass, and plenty of open spaces. The dominant line is combined with a mass of plant material at the focal area; additional material is used to enhance and develop the linear shapes. A design combining unusual components and using more plant material than a Line arrangement. Contrast of texture, color and line are important features.

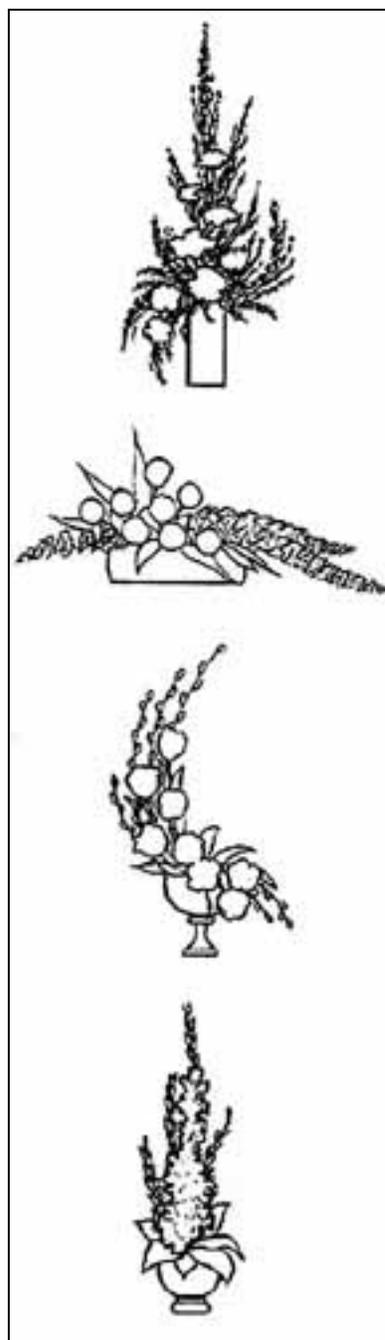
### Mass Arrangements

Mass arrangements are adapted from European designs. They have a thick, full look, with a closed silhouette. Mass design uses more plant material than Line or Line-Mass designs; usually a large amount of plant material is used. The emphasis is on the whole colorful mass of flowers and foliage, rather than on individual components. Color is important in mass arrangements. Round or mass shapes usually dominate, but spiky or linear forms are good for triangular arrangements.

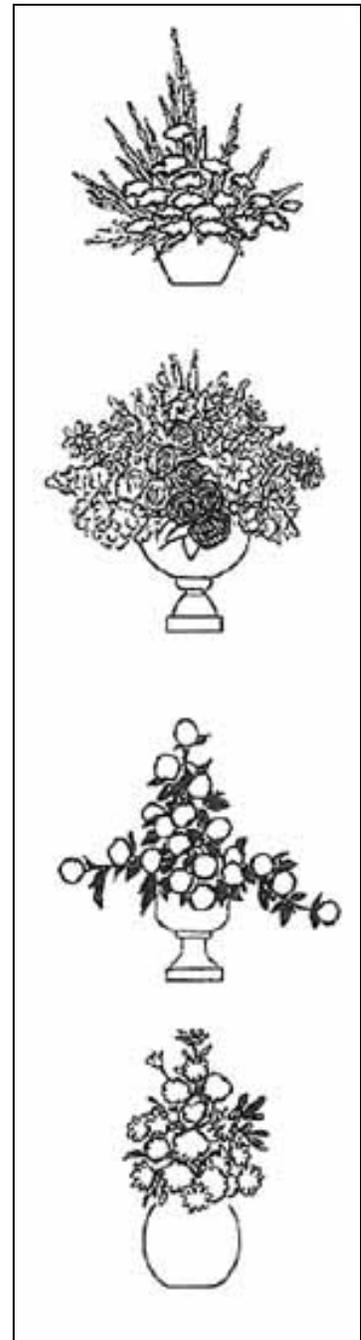
**Line Arrangements**



**Line-Mass Arrangements**



**Mass Arrangements**



# Floral Arrangement Shapes



Crescent



Circle



Triangle



Oval



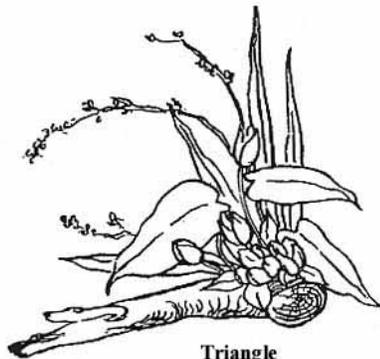
Mass Arrangement



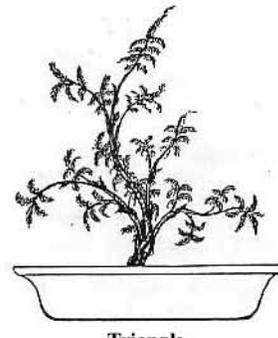
Oval



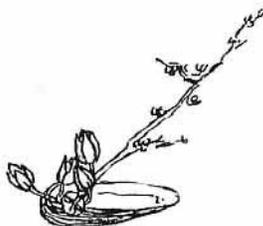
Triangle



Triangle



Triangle



Diagonal Line



Simple Vertical



Spiral

## Design

A floral arrangement is made whenever selected flowers and foliage are placed into a container according to a plan. Flowers casually placed in a container are attractive because of their beautiful color and shape, but the same flowers are even more appealing when arranged in a stylish way.

Design is the selecting and arranging of objects and deals with the form of their composition. Good floral design is the result of a well thought-out plan, with two aims in mind – order and beauty. Good design doesn't just happen, there must be a relationship between all of its component parts – a feeling of security, naturalness, balance and simplicity. The floral arranger must have a basic idea, a mental picture of what they wish to create, where the arrangement will be placed, and the function it will serve. Most floral arrangements are made for a particular purpose or place. The arrangement should be suitable for its intended use. A good floral arrangement should be expressive of a theme or idea and of one's own personality.

In order to arrange flowers in such a manner it is necessary to become acquainted with all the elements of good design. The **elements of design** are color, light, space, line, form, pattern, texture, and size. The **principles of design** are balance, dominance, contrast, rhythm, proportion, and scale. These same elements and principles of design apply to every art form. Some attributes of design are beauty, harmony and expression.

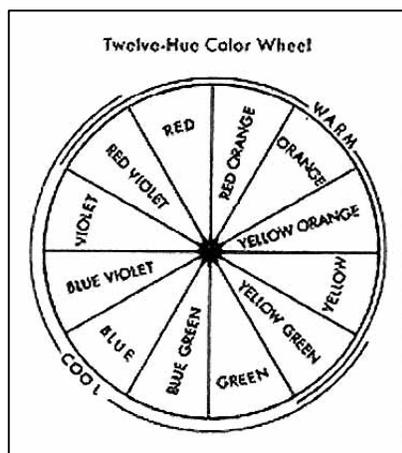
### Elements of Design

#### Color

Colors have different effects on the viewer. Effective use of color is important in floral arrangement design.

Reds, oranges and yellows are generally bright and stimulating, and are considered warm colors. Warm colors tend to be advancing colors (to the eye), and have more visual weight than cool colors.

Blues, greens, and violets are usually tranquil, peaceful and restful and are considered cool colors. Cool colors tend to be receding and have less visual weight than warm colors.



#### Twelve-Hue Color Wheel

The twelve-hue color wheel is helpful in determining which colors will work well together in a design. The twelve hues are categorized as follows:

**Primary colors:** Red, blue and yellow. These three primary colors may be combined to create all other colors.

**Secondary Colors:** Orange, green and violet. The result of combining two primary colors in equal proportion.

**Intermediate Colors:** Blue-green, blue-violet, red-violet, red-orange, yellow orange, and yellow green. The result of combining primary and secondary colors.

## Color Harmonies

The following color harmonies, or color combinations are generally accepted as being pleasing to the eye.

### Related Color Harmonies

#### *Monochromatic*

Consisting of one hue and its tones, tints and or shades.

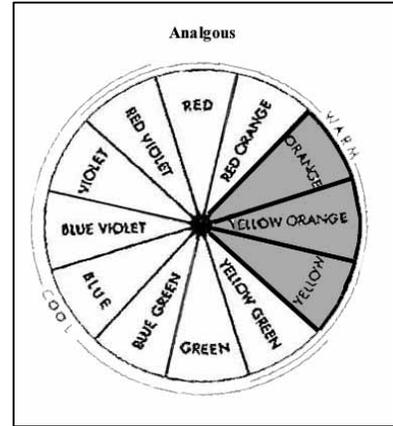
Example: light orange through orange to brown

#### *Analogous*

Colors near each other on the color wheel.

Examples:

yellow, yellow orange, and orange  
green, yellow-green, and yellow

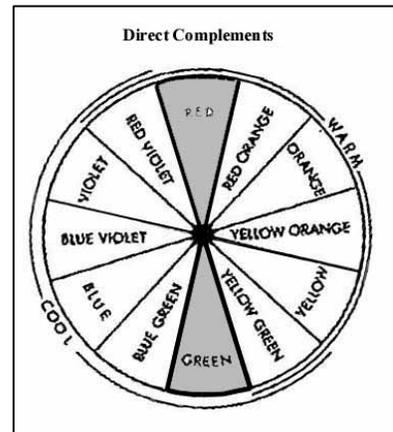


### Contrasting Color Harmonies

#### *Direct complements*

Colors lying opposite one another on the color wheel. Strong contrast is achieved by using direct complements.

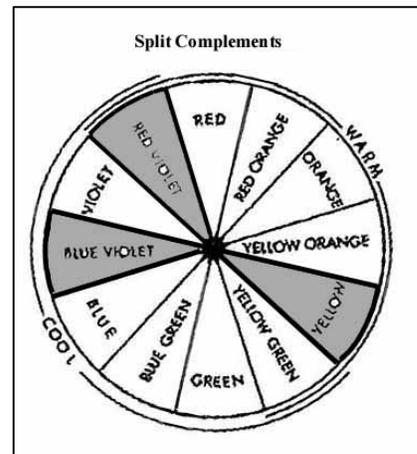
Examples: red and green  
yellow and violet



#### *Split Complements*

A key hue is combined with two hues on either side of its direct complement on the color wheel. A pleasing, interesting and subtle combination. Best results are achieved by using one color dominantly.

Examples:  
yellow with red-violet and blue-violet  
red with yellow-green and blue green



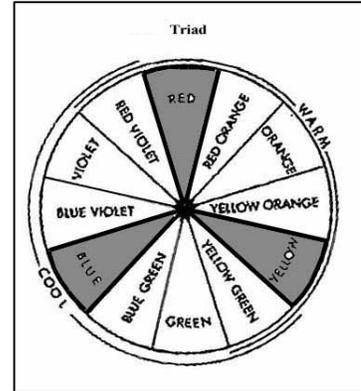
### **Triad**

Three hues equally spaced on the color wheel. A triad color harmony is eye-catching. Generally, one color should dominate with the other colors used to a lesser impact.

Examples:

red, yellow and blue

red-orange, yellow green and blue-violet.



Select colors that work well together. Select different colors of flowers and foliage.

### **Light**

Light affects design in many ways. Light may change apparent colors of materials, enhance form, texture, or depth. While light is a design element to be considered, in the fair setting, lighting is not under the control of the designer. Typically, lighting will be limited to artificial lighting in the form of overhead fluorescent lights. If the display area is open-air, indirect natural light may be present during the day.

### **Space**

Space describes the open area in around the design. Total space may be limited by restrictions imposed by the class schedule, the class description, fair rules, etc. Space also refers to the spaces within individual plant materials selected for use in the design. The designer also establishes spaces within the design through the placement of materials.

### **Line**

The primary foundation of design is line, which creates a visual path for the eye to follow through a design. Lines also function to establish the structural framework or skeleton of a design. Line characteristics may be long or short, straight or curved, weak or strong, etc.

### **Form**

Form describes the three-dimensional aspect of a design. A form may be closed – compact, massed, with few open spaces – typical of a mass design. It may also be open – with spreading parts which produce spaces between the parts - typical of a line or line-mass design. A closed form appears heavier than an open form of the same size.

Form also applies to the shape of individual components of a design. Forms or shapes are generally put into three main groups according to their shape:

#### **Spiky/Linear Shapes**

Useful for line and line-mass arrangements. Often used to form the skeleton of an arrangement. Examples: gladiolus, iris, ornamental grasses, twigs and branches.

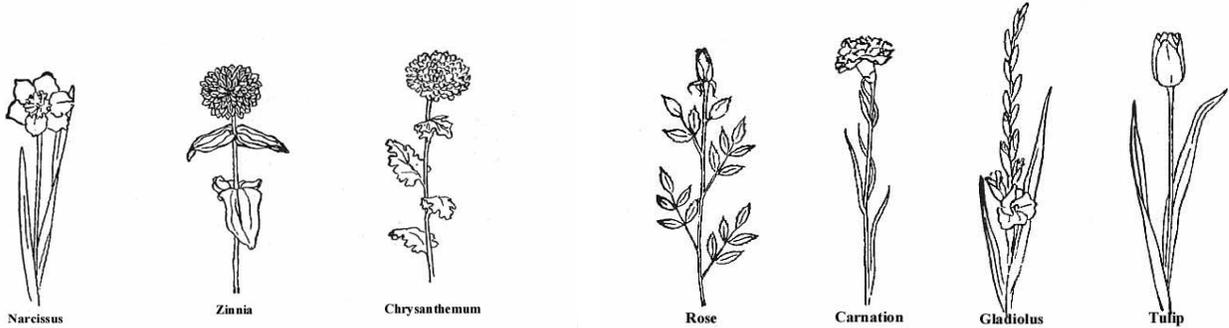
#### **Mass/Rounded Shapes**

Useful for line-mass or mass arrangements. May be used to develop the focal point in line-mass arrangements or make up almost all of a mass arrangement. Examples: chrysanthemum, marigold, rose, zinnia, hosta leaf.

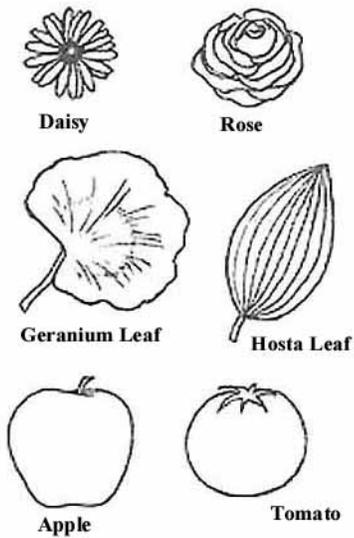
### Spray or Filler Shapes

Useful for mass and line-mass arrangements. Use as background fillers and as space fillers in mass arrangements. Prune and thin to use in line-mass arrangements. Examples: baby's breath, ageratum, ferns, asparagus leaves, parsley.

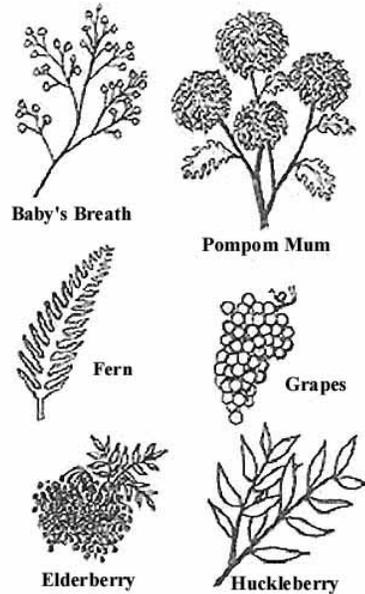
### Spiky or Linear Forms



### Mass or Rounded Shapes



### Spray or Filler Shapes



### Pattern

Pattern is the design formed by solids and spaces. Individual components in a design have a pattern of their own; individual components are combined into an overall pattern.

### Texture

Plant texture refers to the surface quality of plant material. Textural contrast and variety can add interest to a design. A plant's texture may be fuzzy, glossy, smooth, rough, etc. Texture also applies to the overall effect of the arrangement of the petals or florets; for example, a spray of baby's breath has an airy texture, a rose has a velvety texture, a zinnia has a dense texture.

### **Size**

Select flowers and leaves of different size. Usually buds and small flowers are used at the top and edges of an arrangement, while large leaves or fully opened flowers are placed low in the arrangement. A large element is often used as a focal point.

In floral design, size also applies to apparent or visual size. A flower's size may be expressed as delicate, heavy or bold.

### **Attributes of Design**

#### **Expression**

Expression is an attribute of design. Through the artistic and creative selection of components, a mood, feeling or idea may be expressed, and communicated to the viewer. For example: daffodils and pussy willows suggest spring; cattails make one think of a swamp; sunflowers are casual and suggest summer; white roses are formal and elegant.

#### **Harmony**

Harmony is an attribute of design, and is the principle that produces a feeling of unity throughout the entire composition. To obtain harmony, all components must have something in common either in size, shape, texture, idea, time of flowering or color.



Harmony is not well expressed in this arrangement because such heavy, coarse flowers as zinnias have little in common with a spring flowering shrub.



Flowers and plant materials should be selected that have something in common such as flowering habit and blooming date. The narcissus harmonizes nicely with a spring flowering shrub.

#### **Unity**

Unity is an attribute of design, and is that quality that expresses congeniality, cooperation, and a spirit of working together as a unit. Unity is the fitting or bringing together of all of those principles and elements which go into making up the design or composition. Ask yourself the following questions:

- 1) Are all of the components in the arrangement of good quality?
- 1) Is there unity between the container and material used?
- 2) Is the arrangement beautiful and well suited to its purpose?
- 3) Is the arrangement simple, impressive, and dignified?
- 4) Will it leave a pleasing effect on you, or is it only passive in nature? Is it well proportioned, well balanced and stable?



This ornate container detracts from the lilies because of its texture as well as unity.



The container used here emphasizes the beauty of the lilies rather than detracting from them.

## Principles of Design

### Balance

Balance means that the finished arrangement does not fall over or look as if it will fall over. Consider the balance from top to bottom, side to side, and front to back. Balance is a feeling of rest, security or stability. There are two types of balance – symmetrical (or formal) balance and asymmetrical (or informal) balance.

Symmetrical balance (formal balance) means that one side of the arrangement is nearly a mirror image of the other. Symmetrical balance requires a repetition of flowers, buds, and foliage on both sides of the central axis with the two sides as nearly alike as possible.

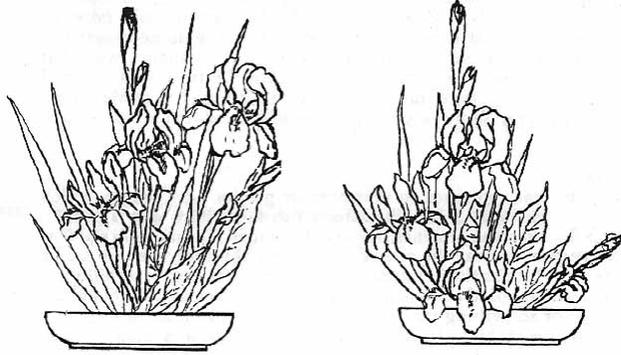
Asymmetrical balance (informal balance) means that the plant material and placement are different on each side of the central axis. Although the sides of the arrangement differ, they should have equal visual weight to maintain a sense of balance. Asymmetrical arrangements balance different flowers, buds, and foliage. The axis in informal balance does not need to be through the middle of the container.

In floral arrangement, formal balance is the most easy to execute, is dignified and impressive, but appears very mechanical. While formal balance is inspiring, its effectiveness depends greatly on one's ability to recognize values and arrange them in a restful manner.



In this arrangement, formal or symmetrical balance is illustrated. Both sides of the arrangement are composed of materials that are the same kind, form, size and color in equal amounts.

In informal, or asymmetrical balance, the two sides may be distinctively different, but they have an equal weight such that the sides balance one another.



Examples of poor and good balance are shown with iris in these two arrangements. The same flowers have been used in both arrangements, but to better advantage in the one on the right.

### Visual Balance

Visual balance depends upon placement of flowers and foliage. A form (flowers and foliage) the same size and color used higher or further away from the axis will appear heavier than the same form (flower or foliage) used lower in the design and closer to the axis. Using larger or darker plant material just above the container creates visual stability. However, too much weight placed low in the design can make the design too bottom heavy.

### Focal Point

That area or portion of a design which first attracts attention. The focal point is usually placed low in the arrangement near the center, just above the container in such a way that it breaks the horizontal line of the container. Normally the focal point is composed of some massive material such as a large flower, bright color or something that will immediately attract attention, have weight and give stability to the arrangement.



This arrangement has a weak focal point because the darker flowers have not been grouped to form as strong a focal point.



The arrangement appears to be more stable and better balanced when the large, darker flowers are placed near the focal point.

### Dominance, Accent or Emphasis

Dominance in floral arrangement is the greater force of a design element, such as more round forms, or more curved lines. Dominance may be achieved through the use of a dominant color, size, shape or texture, or by using larger forms or stronger colors. Accent may also accomplished by introducing sharp contrast in form, size or color. Arrangements should have a **focal point** to attract immediate attention or interest. Accent or emphasis is used to first attract attention to the most important feature in an arrangement (focal point) and from that point to every detail in order of its importance.



The focal point is definitely lacking here. There is a fixed line of demarcation between the container and flowering materials used.



By introducing the two leaves of sharp contrast in form and size, accent or emphasis has been placed where it is most needed.

### **Rhythm**

Rhythm refers to movement. The swing or motion in an arrangement should create a dominant visual path, so that the eye is first attracted to the focal point and then carried throughout the entire arrangement. Rhythm in floral arrangements may be obtained through repetition of shapes, hues, line direction, etc. Rhythm may also be achieved through a gradual change or progression (gradation) in size, weight, texture, or color. A continuous line movement of flowers, stems, twigs, or color may also create rhythm.



In every arrangement there should be a feeling of swing or motion. Motion is lacking in the arrangement on the left. By rearranging a few materials, motion is quickly recaptured in the arrangement on the right.

### **Contrast**

Contrast, or difference, is achieved by placing opposite or unlike elements together so as to emphasize or accentuate their differences. Contrast stimulates interest. Too much contrast divides attention.

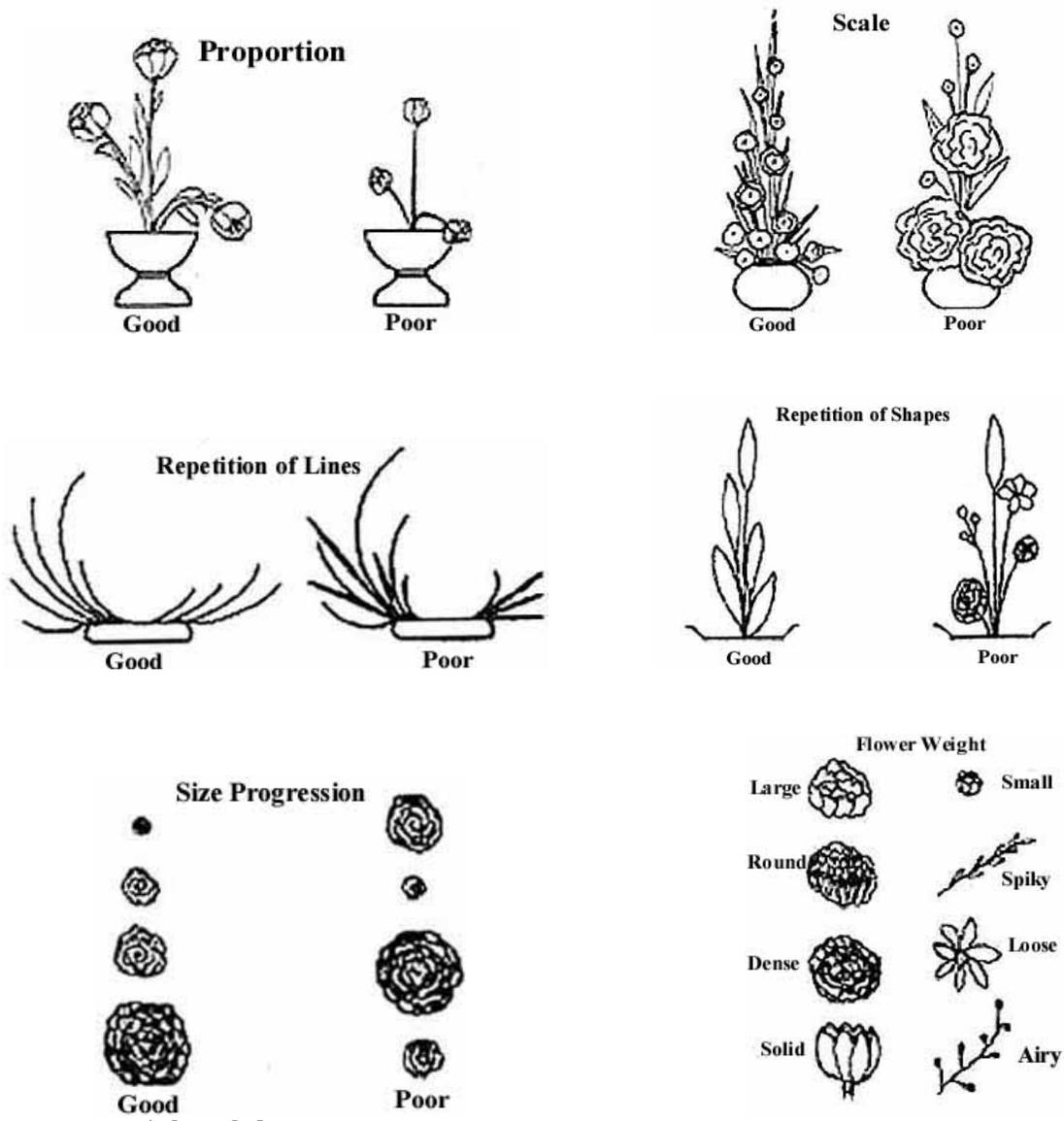
### **Proportion**

Components in the arrangement should be in good proportion to one another. Proportion is important in the use of color, texture or form. Consider the amount of plant material in relation to the container. Also consider the height of the arrangement in relation to its width.

With regard to line, proportion is relative length. In regard to form or space, proportion deals with the relative area or volume. In regard to color, proportion is relative magnitude – the combined effect of color, hue value intensity and texture. Proportion in regard to shape would describe the number of round forms in relation to spike forms. Proportion of size would dictate the number of small flowers in relation to large flowers

**Scale**

Scale is size relationship between flower and flower or between flower and container. When variation of size is too great or too small, components are out of scale. Small flowers will appear smaller when scattered among larger flowers. Better scale balance may be obtained if the smaller flowers are grouped, thus giving them more individuality. Placing small and large elements together accentuates the contrast between the elements. Scale requires special attention in miniature arrangements.



**Acknowledgements:**

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College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences  
Cooperative Extension Service  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

**For more information, contact:**

**Baxter County Master Gardeners  
Baxter County Cooperative Extension Service  
213 East 6th Street, Suite 111  
Mountain Home, AR 72653  
(870) 425-2335**

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