

To condition flowers for a birthday centerpiece, clean the container, trim the stems, and place them in fresh water with flower food. Give the flowers time to drink in a cool spot before arranging them, then keep the finished centerpiece away from heat and direct sun.

Prepare the container and water

Wash the vase or centerpiece container with soap and water, then rinse it thoroughly. A clean container helps limit the buildup of bacteria that can shorten the life of cut flowers.

Fill the container with fresh water and add cut flower food if you have it. Follow the packet directions for the amount of water needed. Using more powder than directed will not necessarily help the flowers.

Choose a container that supports the stems without crowding them. For a low birthday table arrangement, a wide, stable vessel makes it easier for guests to see across the table.

Clean and cut the stems

Remove wrapping and ties, then strip off any leaves that would sit below the waterline. Leaves left in the water can decay and make it cloudy. Keep the leaves higher on the stems if they suit the arrangement.

Use clean, sharp scissors or floral shears to cut the bottom of each stem at an angle. A fresh cut removes the dried end and helps the stem take up water. Place each stem in water promptly after cutting.

Keep the stems longer than you think you need at this stage. You can cut them shorter as you build the centerpiece, but you cannot put the length back.

Let the flowers drink

Stand the prepared stems in water in a cool place while they hydrate. Give them several hours if your schedule allows. Flowers that have been out of water may need time to regain their firmness before you arrange them.

Keep the container away from direct sunlight, radiators, and heat from appliances. Also keep flowers away from ripening fruit, which releases ethylene gas that can speed up aging in some flowers.

Arrange for the table

Check the water level before arranging. Add the largest flowers first, then fill spaces with smaller blooms and foliage. Turn the container as you work so the centerpiece looks balanced from the seats around the table.

Cut stems a little at a time to get the height you want. Remove any extra leaves that fall below the waterline after a stem is shortened.

- Keep the arrangement low enough for guests to see one another.
- Leave space around the vase for plates, glasses, and serving dishes.
- Make sure the container is steady and easy to move.

Care for the finished centerpiece

Check the water daily and top it up as needed. If the water becomes cloudy, empty the container, wash it, and refill it with fresh water and properly measured flower food. Recut the stems before returning them to the vase.

Remove fading flowers and any fallen leaves from the water. Keep the centerpiece cool until it is time to set the birthday table.

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