

To condition cut irises before their buds open, trim the stems, remove leaves that would sit in water, and place the flowers in a clean vase of fresh water. Keep them cool and give the buds time to open, changing the water and trimming the stems regularly.

Start with a clean vase

Wash the vase with soap and water, then rinse it well. Fill it with fresh, cool water and add cut flower food if you have it, following the directions on the packet. A clean start helps keep the water clear and gives the stems a better chance of taking it up.

Choose a vase tall enough to support the stems without crowding them. Iris buds can be surprisingly top heavy once they begin to open, and a vase that lets them lean in every direction may leave you with flowers resting on the table.

Prepare the stems and leaves

Use clean, sharp scissors or a knife to cut a little from the bottom of each stem at an angle. Put the stems straight into water after cutting. Remove any leaves that would fall below the waterline, since submerged foliage can make the water deteriorate more quickly.

Handle the buds gently. Their delicate outer coverings protect the petals as they develop, so leave them in place rather than peeling them back to hurry the show. If a leaf is damaged or looks slimy, remove it, but keep healthy foliage above the water for a natural look.

- Wash and rinse the vase.

- Fill it with cool water and add flower food if available.
- Trim the stems and remove leaves below the waterline.
- Place the irises in water promptly.

Give the buds a cool place

Set the vase away from direct sun, radiators, and other sources of heat. A cool room is a good choice while the stems take up water. Keep the flowers away from ripening fruit, too, because fruit releases ethylene gas that can shorten the life of cut flowers.

Check the vase daily. Replace cloudy water, rinse the vase, and trim the stems again before returning them to fresh water. If you use flower food, follow the packet directions each time you make a fresh solution.

Give the buds some patience, but know that very immature buds may not open after cutting. Buds that already show colour are a more promising choice. Individual iris blooms can be brief, so enjoy each one as it appears and remove faded flowers gently to keep the arrangement tidy.

Questions about unopened irises

Should I put irises in warm water?

Cool, fresh water is a simple choice for conditioning. Keep the vase in a cool room rather than using heat to try to force the buds open.

Can I open a closed bud by hand?

It is better to leave it alone. Pulling at the covering or petals can damage the flower before it has a chance to open naturally.

How often should I change the water?

Check it daily and change it whenever it looks cloudy. Rinse the vase and recut the stems when you replace the water.

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