

Condition April lilacs by cutting fresh stems, removing leaves that would sit in water, and giving the branches a long drink in a clean, deep container. Keep them cool while they hydrate, then arrange them in fresh water away from heat and direct sun.

Choose and cut the stems

Cut lilacs in the cool of the morning, when the plant has had time to take up water overnight. Bring a bucket of clean water into the garden so the stems do not sit dry while you gather them.

Look for flower clusters with some blossoms open and others still in bud. Very tight clusters may not open fully after cutting, while flowers that are already fading have less time left in the vase. Choose branches with healthy leaves and no obvious damage.

Use clean, sharp pruning shears to make a slanted cut above a pair of leaves or buds. A clean cut avoids crushing the branch, and cutting above a leaf pair leaves the plant with a neater place to grow. Take a few stems from different parts of the shrub rather than stripping one area.

Give woody stems a good drink

Remove leaves from the lower portion of each stem, especially any that would fall below the waterline. Leaves left in water decay and can encourage bacterial growth, which makes it harder to keep the water clean.

Put the stems in a clean bucket of room temperature water as soon as they are cut. Use enough water to cover a good length of bare stem, but keep the flower clusters above the surface. Leave the bucket in a cool place for several hours before arranging. This gives the branches time to absorb water after cutting.

There is no need to smash the woody ends with a hammer. Crushing damages the stem and leaves ragged tissue in the water. If a stem needs shortening before arranging, make another clean cut with shears.

Arrange and refresh

Wash the vase before filling it, then add clean water. Arrange the lilacs loosely enough that the flowers have room around them. A crowded vase can make it difficult to remove fading material and clean the container.

- Check the water level daily. Lilac branches can take up water quickly.
- Replace cloudy water and rinse the vase. Clean water helps limit the buildup of bacteria around the cut ends.
- Trim the stems again when you change the water, using clean shears.
- Keep the arrangement away from sunny windows, heaters and other warm spots. Heat can shorten the life of cut flowers.

Questions about cut lilacs

Can I cut lilacs after rain?

Yes. Let the flower clusters shed excess water before bringing them indoors, and choose blooms that are undamaged rather than browned or flattened.

Should I remove every leaf?

No. Remove leaves below the waterline and any that are damaged. A few healthy leaves above the water can add shape to the arrangement.

What if the flowers wilt?

Check that the stems are in water, recut their ends and place them in fresh water in a cool room. They may recover, although heavily wilted flowers may not revive.

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