

Flora & Fauna

Dressing Up Cut Flowers

Bring a little spring into your home during the cold winter months, with fresh cut flowers. You can purchase them through your local florist, or even at a grocery store such as Walmart or Costco. To really get the most bang for your blooms, check out these great tips below!

1. **Transform tulips.** To make these common blooms exotic, just put your thumb under each petal and fold it back with your forefinger. By turning the blooms inside out, they'll almost resemble camellias.
2. **Consider every angle.** It's so much easier to arrange a bouquet on a lazy Susan. Then you can turn the vase and see your display from all sides.
3. **"Shock" roses into drinking up.** Wrap the flowers in brown packaging paper to protect them, then snip a quarter inch off the stems and place them in one inch of boiling water. The shock of it forces the air out; you will be able to see the little bubbles coming from the ends. Leave the roses in place until the water turns tepid. Give the stems a fresh cut, then transfer to cool water.
4. **Pass the PAM.** Would you believe that good old-fashioned cooking spray helps tropical blooms, such as bird-of-paradise, ginger, and heliconia, last. The spray essentially seals the pores of the flower and prevents it from drying out. Just lightly spritz each bloom once from about 12 inches away. It will make them shine, too!
5. **Bring a centerpiece together with a ponytail holder.** Put the band around the stems, about four inches below the tops of the blossoms. Choose clear elastic and position it at the water line; it will be totally invisible and your bouquet will look great!
6. **Stay away from scissors.** For a clean cut, it's best to snip stems with garden clippers or a sharp knife. When you use scissors to trim flowers, especially those with tubular stems like Gerbera daisies, the stems crack. The blooms can't get water and die soon after.
7. **Hydrate hydrangeas.** Hydrangeas drink better from their big flower heads than from those skinny little stems. Put each blossom face-down in room-temperature water and let it soak for about twenty minutes. Then shake the floret out and remove any foliage; otherwise, the leaves will hog all the vase water.
8. **Just add bleach.** If you don't have flower food, a few drops of Clorox bleach in the water will suffice as an alternative. The bleach, like the other additives in flower food, prevents bacteria from growing.

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Cleaning Corner:

The Most Missed Areas...

- **Lunchboxes and back packs.** Turn soft bags inside out and gently wash them with a mild detergent. Use a toothbrush or clean paint brush to scrub the seams. Run your child's hard lunchbox through the dishwasher (if safe), or give it a good scrubbing with a sponge.
- **Glove compartment.** Throw out old condiment packets, outdated directions, and extra food napkins. Check maps, insurance cards, emergency contact information, and registration papers for accuracy. Update first aid kit supplies.
- **Freezer.** The National Center for Home Food Preservation recommends defrosting freezers with a manual feature at least once a year, or when there is more than one fourth of an inch of frost over a large area of the freezer. Get rid of frozen food that is over a year old. Discard any containers that are not properly sealed

January

- 630AD Prophet Muhammad sets out toward Mecca with the army that will capture it bloodlessly
- 1701 Great Britain & Ireland union is in effect, creating United Kingdom
- 1804 Haiti gains independence from France (National Day)
- 1847 Michigan is the first state to abolish capital punishment
- 1853 The first practical horse-drawn fire engine in the US enters service
- 1892 The Ellis Island Immigrant Station in New York formally opens
- 1948 The first color newsreel is filmed in Pasadena, CA
- 1960 Johnny Cash plays the first of many free concerts behind bars
- 1999 The Euro currency is introduced

Health Information: Do you need a stress test?

What is a stress test?

The cardiac stress test is one of the most recognizable health examinations – it looks exactly like you’ve seen it in the movies or on TV: a person exercises on a treadmill and has electrodes stuck to his chest while the clipboard-holding doctor looks on patiently. The cardiac stress test puts the heart under stress by subjecting a patient to strenuous activity. (*Note:* Strenuous activity is relative to the patient. For some, this could be walking at a brisk pace, for others it could be a full-out run.)

When we engage in strenuous physical activity, our muscles require more oxygen and energy to keep up with the demands we are placing on them. So, to get more blood to the areas in need, the heart pumps faster. Blockages in arteries of the heart – caused by years of damage from high blood pressure and plaque buildup – can limit the blood’s ability to flow to the muscle. When this happens, heart muscle cells are injured or even die, and a heart attack follows.

Even before a person experiences any physical symptoms, a heart attack is indicated by changes in the natural electrical impulses that run through the heart. By walking on a treadmill and then increasing the speed and incline, the heart is forced to work harder. The electrodes that the doctor places on a patient’s chest trace the electrical impulse running through the heart and monitor blood pressure, respiratory rate, and other factors. They enable the doctor to tell if part of the heart is not getting the energy and oxygen it needs. With this information, the doctor can decide if further, possibly life-saving interventions are necessary.

Who needs one?

A stress test is usually given to people who experience the symptoms of reduced blood flow to the heart, such as shortness of breath or chest pressure or pain, with or without exertion. A test may also be warranted for people who have two or more risk factors for coronary artery disease:

- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- A family history of heart disease
- Smoking
- Obesity
- Diabetes
- Age 65 or older
- Stroke

What are its limitations?

Although a stress test is an extremely useful health assessment, it does have its limitations. It is only capable of detecting medium to large defective areas in the arteries of the heart; it reveals little about whether the smaller arteries are diseased. These microvessels are equally capable of precipitating heart attack. In fact, there is evidence that more women than men – up to three million in the US – suffer from microvascular disease. So if you are experiencing chest discomfort, unusual fatigue or other symptoms that make you uneasy, don’t ignore them. Bring them up with your doctor right away.

Kid Corner: Six Ways to Be an Awesome Parent

You’re the best gift you could ever give your children. So, let them know how much you care for them with these simple tips:

1. **Show lots of love.** Hug your children often, starting early. As they grow older, applaud their accomplishments. Affection and praise can help you build a strong relationship and give your child a positive sense of self-worth.
2. **Set a good example.** Little eyes see all you do, from how you treat your spouse or significant other, to how you handle life’s problems. If your child sees you coping with stress by swearing, throwing things, or bullying others, he or she will pick up those very same behaviors. Children mirror their parents closely, so if you’re not happy with the way your child treats others or deals with frustration – it may be a reflection of *you*.
3. **Interact.** Spending time together shows kids that they’re important. Occasionally, that might mean giving up some of your activities so you can play with your children or cheer them on at a game. Just remember the value of spending time with your kids. Childhood happens only once – there are no do-overs.
4. **Earn the right to be heard.** Talk with your children – and not just when they’ve done something wrong. Begin when they’re young and continue to talk often. Really listen, too. This helps build trust, which will encourage your kids to listen when you offer guidance as they grow older.
5. **Discipline with love.** The right kind of discipline helps children learn limits. Teach your kids that actions have consequences – if they take a toy from a sibling, they get a time out. If they throw a tantrum instead of doing as they’re told, they’ll spend five minutes in the corner. When they don’t do things as you’d expect, control your emotions. Never yell at or hit them. And remember to reward good behavior. If your child cleans his room without being asked, tell him you’re proud of him. If your child shares her toys give her a hug and tell her how happy you are to see her being so kind.
6. **Be a teacher.** Look for ways to help your children learn life’s lessons. For example, you can encourage young children to dress themselves or put toys away when they’re done playing. This helps them become self-sufficient. Talk with older kids about alcohol, drugs, and peer pressure. Gradually give them chances to make decisions. This helps prepare them for adulthood.

Remember, no parent is perfect. Just keep working at being the best parent you can be!

This is a very simple recipe that makes a delicious side dish to any main course. It's especially good on a cold winter day with a some hot tomato soup.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups of thinly sliced onions
- 1 egg
- 3/4 cup milk
- 1 cup crushed crackers
- 1/4 cup butter
- 1 cup Velveeta cheese

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Boil water in a medium pot and add onions. Cook at a soft boil for 10 minutes. Remove from heat and drain.
3. Return pot to burner set on medium/low. Add egg and milk, stir. Add crackers and butter, stir. Add Velveeta cheese and stir until melted throughout.
4. Transfer contents to 9x9-inch casserole dish and bake uncovered in oven for 35 minutes.
5. Remove and serve!

The Amazing Onion

The onion has been used as an ingredient in various dishes for thousands of years by many cultures around the world. There are many different varieties, each with their own unique flavor, from very strong to mildly sweet. They can be eaten raw, cooked, fried, dried or roasted. They are commonly used to flavor dips, salads, soups, spreads, stir-fry and other dishes.

Onions are rich with nutrients that fight stomach and colon cancer, prevent blood clots, and protect against cardiovascular disease. They've even been known to improve lung function in asthmatics and fight infections.

Driver's Ed: Must-Have Safety Features

When you slide behind the wheel of your car, you can feel pretty good about your level of protection. Today's cars are vastly safer than those from just a few decades ago, thanks to a slew of technological advances. Nevertheless, some cars do offer more protection than others. When it's time to buy a new one, you'll want to know which features will protect you and your family the most.

Here are the top three must-have safety features:

1. **Side airbags.** Side impact (protects the torso) and head curtain (protects the head in a side collision) airbags have been proven to reduce fatalities anywhere from 26-52%, depending on the type of airbag and style of car. About 90% of 2009 cars have side airbags (they either come standard or are an option you can add on). Ideally, you want both kinds in your car.
2. **Electronic stability control (ESC).** This complex system monitors how the car is responding to your steering and helps keep the vehicle under control during emergency moves, like a sudden swerve. When needed, ESC applies the brakes and cuts engine power to reduce sideways skidding, which can lead to rollovers. Though this feature will be required in all cars by the 2012 model year, it's currently available in about 90% of 2009 vehicles (either as a standard or optional feature).
3. **Active head restraints.** These headrests have an internal design that provides added protection against whiplash in a crash. More than one third of 2009 cars offer them.

Of course, no car should be without the following:

1. **Seatbelts for all passengers.** Seatbelts save lives and are mandatory in most states. Always buckled up every time you get in the car, no matter how short the trip may be.
2. **Spare tire.** A flat can happen anywhere, so make sure you've got a spare tire, tire iron, road flares, and car jack in your trunk.
3. **First aid kit.** Many stores sell kits that fit in your glove compartment. If you've already got one, make sure it's fully stocked.
4. **Flashlight.** Emergencies don't always happen in daylight!

Carpet Cleaning Basics

The beauty and life of a carpet depends largely on the care that it is given. Proper maintenance can add years of attractive life. For carpeting, proper maintenance includes regular vacuuming and periodic cleaning by a professional.

Regular vacuuming should be done every 1-2 weeks, and even more often in high traffic areas. It is important to use a well-maintained, good quality vacuum.

Professional cleanings are essential to maintain the life and beauty of your carpet and should be done every year. But before having a carpet cleaned, you may find it helpful to understand a few of the carpet cleaning methods.

- **Hot Water Extraction or "Steam" Cleaning.** In this method, hot water mixed with cleaning solution is sprayed on the carpet and immediately extracted (along with the dissolved soil) by an extraction machine. Hot water extraction is often referred to as "steam" cleaning. In actuality, this is a misnomer as the temperature of the heated solution never reaches the point to generate steam.
- **Shampooing.** In this process, a cleaning detergent is whipped into a foam against the carpet by a floor machine. This suspends the soil, and the wet/dry vacuum removes it.
- **Bonnet Cleaning.** A special detergent is applied to the carpet, then agitated and absorbed, along with the soil, into the padding of the machine.
- **Encapsulation Cleaning.** An encapsulant is sprayed onto the carpet and then agitated by a machine. The encapsulant suspends dirt and soil, and then dries to a brittle crystal that is vacuumed off later – taking the dirt with it!



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Inside this issue you'll find:

- Dressing Up Cut Flowers
- Cleaning Corner: Most Missed Areas
- Health Advice: Do You Need a Stress Test?
- Kid Corner: Six Ways to Be An Awesome Parent
- Scalloped Onions
- Driver's Ed: Must-Have Safety Features
- Carpet Cleaning Basics
- January Money-Saving Special



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