Indoor Gardening

BY E. F. SCHAUFLER

Corsages from Garden Flowers

INTRODUCTION

Many garden flowers growing around your home provide an abundance of material for corsages. These corsages, made correctly, are inexpensive, easy to make, and appreciated by anyone receiving them. This activity will enable you to learn how to assemble corsages easily. You will learn correct choices of materials, wiring, and taping of usable flowers. Every flower garden provides some bloom that can be worked into attractive flowers to wear. Flowers may be worn on your shoulder, in your hair, at your waist, or on your purse.

Activity Requirements

1. You should make 12 corsages of flower materials. These can be made anytime during the blooming season of your garden flowers, or from florists flowers during the winter. Use three different designs, such as spray, individual flower, and cluster.
2. Attend a meeting on assembling corsages, or make them to your leader's satisfaction from the following instructions.
3. Record your finished corsages in 4-H Project Record R-7-3.

1. Take a picture or two of your finished corsages and turn these in with your record sheet.

Equipment for the activity

To assemble fresh flower corsages you will need:

1. Fresh flowers from your garden. Some good corsage materials are:

   | Crocus   | Shasta Daisies | Narcissi |
   | Squills  | Lemon Lilies   | Anemones |
   | Snowdrops| German Iris    | Tulips  |
   | Grape Hyacinths | Carnation | Dwarf Iris |
   | Primulas | Pinks         | English Daisies |
   | Lily-of-the-valley | Roses  | Peonies |
   | Chrysanthemums | Delphiniums | Marigolds |
   | Balloon flower | Geraniums | Zinnias |
   | Asters   | Sweet Peas    | Gladiolus |
   | Gaillardia|              |         |

2. Florist's wire number 18, 24, and 32 will handle all fresh corsage materials. Eighteen-inch lengths of wire are preferred. Ask your local florist if he or she will sell you some. Your leader may be able to obtain wire through your county home department. Many gardening magazines carry advertisements for corsage materials.
3. Ribbon in colors to match or contrast with the flowers you are using. At least 3 feet of ribbon is needed for a bow.
4. Shears for cutting flower stems.
5. Wire cutters (florist's shears preferred) or small tin snips.
6. Floratape, green, 1/2-inch roll.
7. Foliage for flower backing:
   - Rhododendron
   - Mountain Laurel
   - English ivy
   - Japanese honeysuckle
   - Arborvitae
8. Record Sheet R-7-3.

Corsages should not be too large for the wearer. The finished corsage should not extend beyond the shoulder. It should not be so large that it interferes with turning the head, or is easily broken when you are dancing. Corsages are worn with the heads up, the way they grow.

ASSEMBLING CORSAGES

Conditioning flowers

The first step for a long lasting corsage is proper conditioning or hardening of cut flowers. This process forces flowers to absorb as much water as they can hold. The more water a flower has in its cells when you make it into a corsage, the longer it will last. Flowers to be used in corsages and flower arrangements last very well if treated as follows.

1. Cut flowers either in the morning, before 10 o'clock, or in the evening. Choose a cutting time when flowers are not likely to suffer from heat, wind or sun.
2. Put the flowers in a small pail of water immediately so they do not have a chance to wilt.
3. Cut flowers with a sharp knife, making a clean slanting cut. Scissors may crush the stems and keep water from entering.
4. Let the flowers stand in deep, warm water (110°F) in a cool, dark basement for about six hours or overnight.

Types of corsages

After your cut flowers have been hardened, you will choose a design or corsage pattern. This may be determined by the kind of flower you are using. The three types of corsages are:

- Cluster or nosegay
- Spray
- Individual flower

A nosegay corsage takes much more time than a spray or individual flower corsage because of the amount of wiring and taping that must be done. This type is not suggested for beginners.
The materials used for the corsage in figure 1 are a rose, ageratum florets, globe amaranth, and English ivy leaves for backing. A colonial bouquet is made in the same way.

Other cluster corsages are made by gathering one type of flower into a ball-like mass. This is often done with sweet peas or violets. A sweet pea or violet corsage does not require separate wiring of individual flowers, because the flowers are tightly packed and support each other. A backing of stiff, green leaves adds more support. A wrapping of aluminum foil creates a good finish for a cluster corsage.

Spray corsages are individual flowers arranged in a loose group. Stems must be wired to hold the flower in the position you place it. Each flower is wired separately and its stem wrapped.

Roses, daisies, irises, small chrysanthemums, and most round corsage flowers can be treated this way. After arranging the flowers to your liking, add wired foliage to form a backing. Be sure your flowers are arranged in a pleasing fashion before securing the materials together.

The individual flower corsage is usually made of one large flower, such as a peony, tulip, iris, or lily. A wired flower and flower bud are sometimes used, backed by a few leaves. The leaves set off the beauty of the bloom.

**How to wire flowers**

Wire is used to replace or strengthen flower stems. The wire used must be strong enough to hold a flower in a fixed position. Try each flower after you have wired it to see that it is able to support the weight of the flower head.

There are three main ways to wire flowers. These methods of wiring are clutch, hook, and piercing. There are many modifications of these methods. Your leader or florist may use different adaptations than those shown here.

The clutch method is used on flowers whose heads are securely fastened to the stems. If a floret, such as the ageratum in figure 4 is being wired, a number 24, or medium wire is used. If the wire will be double, a medium wire can support a fairly heavy blossom.

To wire a floret, leave an inch of stem below the floret. Place the midpoint of an 18-inch piece of number 24 wire directly beneath the floret. If you are right-handed, hold the stem and wire in your left hand.

With your right hand gently bend the wire around the stem. Do this gently so the wire will not cut into the stem. If the wire is too stiff, or cuts into the stem, try a finer wire. Practice will enable you to choose the correct size of wire for every flower.

Bring the wire around the stem and the loose wire, so the flower stem is securely held. Three or four turns are all that are needed.
Delicate flowers can often be wired by the hook method. Use a number 32 wire for delicate florets. Form a small hook in one end of a 9-inch piece of wire. Push the wire down through the floret. After the hook has been pulled down into the floret, wrap the wire around the short stem one or two turns. This will hold a small flower very securely.

An alternate method sometimes used with slightly heavier flowers employs two 9-inch pieces of wire. Select wire in a size that will barely carry the weight of the flower. After removing all but an inch of stem, form a small hook in one end. Push the wire down through the head and short piece of stem. Pull the hook down into the flower head.

Take the second wire and place its midpoint just below the flower head. Bend one end around the stem and the second wire. Wrap the first end of wire around the stem and the second wire three or four times, making sure the stem and wire are held tightly. Tape covers all the wires.

The third method of wiring is commonly called piercing. It is used mainly on flowers having a large hard portion directly beneath the bloom. One flower commonly wired by piercing is the rose. Leave about one inch of stem on the rose flowers.

Push an 18-inch piece of number 18 or number 20 wire halfway through the hard portion of the flower, a little below the petals. Gently pull both wires parallel, or alongside the stem. Gently bend one wire around the stem and the other wire three or four times.

Another floret wired by piercing is the gladiolus. This floret is very fragile and tears easily. Therefore a finer wire is used. Sometimes a third wire is used, although figure 10 shows only two.

To wire gladiolus, use two or three number 32 wires. Push each one half-way through the floret. Gently bend the wires back. Take one of the four wires and pull it gently around the floret end and other wires.

As you work with different flowers, you will find the wiring methods described and their variations fit every flower you can use for corsage making.
How to wire foliage

Broadleaf evergreen leaves, and mature leaves of such shrubs as lilac and honeysuckle are often used as backing material. The hairpin method is used with leaves stiff enough to support themselves.

Make a hairpin of number 28 wire. Push it through the leaf about one-half inch above the lower edge. Form one of the ends of the wire along the stem. Then wind the other wire around the stem and wire.

How to tape flowers

Floratape is a stretchy material that sticks to itself. It is used to tape or cover the wires used in putting stems on corsage flowers. Green is the color commonly used with garden flowers.

Wires that will show as part of a corsage are always taped before the corsage is assembled. Only in a cluster type corsage may the actual stems of sweet peas or violets be covered with floratape after they have been gathered together.

To tape a wired flower, start by rolling some stretched floratape onto the wire directly below the flower head.

Hold the tape at right angles to the wire to start it. Roll the wire onto the tape so it is fastened securely.

Figure 11. Hairpin method for wiring a leaf.

Figure 12. Begin taping by rolling floratape onto the wire directly below the flower head.

Figure 13. Stretch and roll the tape along the wire to create a smooth, finished look.

Stretch the tape slightly after it is fastened. It is best to practice on a piece of number 18 wire before attempting to tape a wired floret.

Then pull the floratape along the wire. Twist or roll the wire so the tape will roll on. Be sure to stretch the tape so it gives a finished look. Only one layer of tape is needed to cover the wire.

Spray and individual flower corsages usually have all the florets and backing leaves taped individually.

Stems of sweet peas and violets used in cluster corsages are left on the flowers. After the stems are gathered, they are covered with floratape. No wire is used.

How to make a bow

Bows are used to add color and finish to some corsages. The bow is never the most prominent part of a corsage. You will need at least three feet of ribbon in a color that matches or contrasts the flowers you are using.
Figure 14. To begin a bow, hold a piece of ribbon between your thumb and index finger and make a loop about one and a half inches long.

Figure 15. Make three or four additional loops above and below your fingers. Pinch each loop between your fingers as it is made.

Figure 16. Place the center of a 12-inch piece of number-32 wire on the spot at which the loops have been pinched together.

Figure 17. Pull the wire around the ribbon and twist it together tightly two or three times.

Figure 18. Here is the finished bow. Use the free ends of the wire to fasten the bow to the corsage.

Assembling a spray corsage

The guides for placing materials in a spray corsage are the same as for arranging flowers. The smallest flower is used at the top of the corsage. The larger flowers are used at the bottom, as the focal point or center of interest. Generally five or seven florets, an inch or so in diameter, make a nice corsage. If roses are used, choose a small flowered variety. Sweetheart roses or small florabundas are good. Many small flowered annuals, such as marigolds and zinnias are good spray corsage materials.

Cut more flowers than you actually need. Choose a bud and flowers in various stages of opening. For a rose corsage, wire and tape the selected ones as directed under the piercing method of wiring. In the step-by-step pictures, foliage has been added at the time of taping. Wired foliage may be added after the flowers are wired and arranged.

After three flowers are placed, bind them securely with a piece of fine wire. Leave the ends of the wire free to fasten the additional flowers. When all flowers are in place, tape covers the binding wire. The bow, added as the final touch, is tucked beneath the flowers and foliage. The bow is not a prominent part of any corsage.
FRESH FLOWER CORSAGES DURING THE WINTER

Carnations are available from florists during the winter months. A simple cluster corsage can be made by selecting four small or medium size carnations and a sprig of carnation foliage.

Cut the carnation stems to four or five inches. Line up the four blooms, and run a number 24 wire through the thick green portion of the flower head, as you would if stringing beads.

Pull the carnations into a tight circle, crossing and twisting the wire. Cut off the excess, and bend the ends into the thick part beneath the flower head. A bow may be added for additional color, but it is not required.

Advanced work in corsages during the winter months can be done by assembling corsages of shattered or feathered carnations. This is a novelty corsage and requires more time and work than an ordinary corsage. Step by step instructions are given in figures 22 to 31.

HOW TO WEAR CORSAGES

Corsages are worn with the flower heads up. In most cases, this is the way they grow. Corsage pins are very useful. They are about three inches long and available in various colors. Whiteheaded corsage pins are in good taste with all corsages.

Make corsages for your own enjoyment, and for the enjoyment of others.

Figure 20. For a simple cluster corsage, use four small carnations. Cut the stems to four or five inches.

Figure 21. Run a wire through the flower heads. Pull the carnations into a tight circle and twist the wire.

Figure 22. Four flowers are needed for a feathered carnation corsage. One is left whole, two are halved, one is quartered.

Figure 23. Cut the stems to about one-fourth inch, and remove the calyx (green portion) to release the petals.

Figure 24. Shake the petals to expose the seed box or pistol. Pinch off the seed box with your thumb and index finger.

Figure 25. With a sharp knife, divide the petals into parts. Leave a little stem with each section to hold petals together.
Figure 26. Hold the small bunch of petals in your left hand, and gently loop a number-32 wire around the petals.

Figure 27. Use number 22 wire, bent double, to give the stems rigidity. This wire is held in place by taping.

Figure 28. Tape each shattered portion. Start the tape just under the flower head and stretch it smoothly along the wire.

Figure 29. Arrange the four quarters to form the outline of the corsage. Wrap a wire around stems to hold them in place.

Figure 30. Add the whole flower, just off center, and use a wire to bind it securely in position.

Figure 31. Add the halves — one above, one below, one to right and one to left of the whole flower. Wire in place and wrap with tape.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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