

Cigarette smoke may shorten the life of cut flowers, particularly flowers that are sensitive to ethylene gas. Keeping a bouquet away from smoke is a sensible precaution, though clean water and a cool spot also make a difference.

Why smoke may affect flowers

Cigarette smoke contains ethylene, a gas that can speed up aging in some flowers. Sensitive blooms may wilt, drop petals or close sooner after exposure. The effect depends on the kind of flower, how much ethylene reaches it and how long it is exposed.

Not every flower reacts in the same way. Carnations, for example, are sensitive to ethylene, while some other flowers are less affected. A bouquet can contain several kinds of blooms, so one stem may show signs of aging before the others.

Smoke is not the only possible cause when flowers fade early. Blooms may already be mature when you receive them, and heat, bacteria in the water or stems that cannot take up enough water can also shorten their life. A few fading petals do not necessarily mean that smoke was responsible.

Where to put a bouquet

Choose a cool room where people do not smoke. If smoking happens near an open window or doorway, place the flowers well away from that area rather than beside it. Moving a vase to another room can give the blooms a more sheltered spot.

Keep the arrangement away from direct sun, heaters and warm appliances, too. Fruit is another source of ethylene, so a place away from the fruit bowl is a useful choice for sensitive flowers. There is no need to find a perfect room. A little distance from these sources is a good start.

Simple care for longer lasting blooms

Fresh water and clean tools help flowers take up the water they need. These small steps are useful for almost any bouquet:

- Use a clean vase and fill it with fresh water.
- Remove leaves that would sit below the waterline.
- Trim the ends of the stems before putting them in water.
- Change the water regularly and clean the vase if it becomes cloudy.
- Remove fading flowers as they start to spoil.

If flower food came with the bouquet, follow the directions on the packet. Check the water level each day, especially in a warm room, and top it up as needed. Handle delicate petals gently when moving or tidying the arrangement.

Questions about smoke and cut flowers

Will one exposure to smoke ruin a bouquet?

Not necessarily. The response varies by flower and exposure. Move the bouquet to a smoke free room and continue its usual care.

Can flowers recover after their petals begin to wilt?

Petals that have started to age may not recover. Fresh water and trimmed stems can help flowers that are struggling to take up water, but they cannot reverse every cause of wilting.

Is an open window enough protection?

An open window may help air out a room, but it does not guarantee that smoke will stay away from the flowers. A separate smoke free room is a more reliable choice.

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