

Tips From A Petal Pro

Here are a few of Sarah's suggestions for the florally challenged.

- To get the freshest flowers at a grocery or discount store, find someone who works in the floral section and ask what day of the week they get in their new shipments. Buy your flowers on that day or the day after.
- Think outside of the box when adding color and texture to an arrangement. Use foliage from tropical plants, fruits, or vegetables. Stick them on a wooden skewer, or use them to fill the base of a glass vase.
- Divide and conquer. Some mums, for example, contain many blooms on one stalk, and they work much better in a centerpiece when each smaller stem is separated and spread through the arrangement.

Sarah turns simple blooms into stunning arrangements at her Urban Petals floral design studio.

Sarah was working with a D.C. florist when she got the chance to branch out on her own. "I took a job with Barbara von Elm's Growing Wild Floral Company, and she helped me a lot," Sarah says. "Luckily Barbara kept me on until I could get my own company going."

Empowering Parties

Soon Sarah was educating as well as arranging. She started going to friends' homes and putting on parties to help them learn floral design.

Using Sarah's individual approach to arranging, design-deficit novices turn simple flowers from gardens and grocery stores into one-of-a-kind centerpieces and displays. "Most of the time, when we finish, they can't believe what they've made," she says. "It's a wonderfully empowering experience. It's the magic of flowers."

JAMES T. BLACK

Urban Petals: (202) 297-4270 or www.urbanpetals.com. An at-home party costs \$60 to \$80 per person, depending on the types of flowers used.

Flower Power

In Sarah von Schrader's flower-arranging classes, students learn to decorate with daisies and garnish with gladioli.

Young women circle the table like honeybees exploring a field of wildflowers. Buckets of red and white roses and bunches of fresh greenery fill one end of the room. Clutching garden shears and glass vases, the nervous students stare intently at the petite, smiling instructor. "Relax, there isn't anything myste-

rious about arranging flowers," says Sarah von Schrader, founder of the Urban Petals floral design firm in Washington, D.C. "We may all be using the same materials, but I guarantee each of your arrangements will be different."

The Lone Arranger

Although she's barely 28, Sarah has already helped dozens of flora-fearing folks master the fine art of flower arranging. Sarah first cultivated her skills while attending Yale University. "I worked as an unpaid apprentice for two florists in New York one summer," she says. "I did a little bit of everything."