



Lower
the

Bloom

✿ SOME OF THE BEST SAPPY MOVIES star just-plucked clusters of dandelions or daisies from the cute neighbor boy's yard. But in real life, a weed bouquet won't land your pad in Elle Decor, and stealing from someone's garden could get you arrested. Still, a lack of cash doesn't mean your flower arrangements can't be flash. "I'll cut grasses and put them in vases. It's summery! I keep shears in my car," says Stephanie Meuse Melvin of Wisteria (Wisteriaflorals.com), an Alexandria shop that offers posy-arranging classes.

Another cheap trick: Let containers carry the creative load, says D.C. florist Sarah von Pollaro of Urban Petals (Urbanpetals.com) and Petals for the People, a subscription service launching mid-July hawking bouquets and design tips for \$25 a pop. She bunches stems in unexpected vessels: mod toothbrush containers and aluminum trash cans.

So, if your budget has wilted, take a cue from the D.C. florists who did these arrangements. Each cost less than \$30, including the vase. That's a blooming wonder. **KATIE KNOVROVSKY**

All the Bright Moves

WHO: Sarah von Pollaro of Urban Petals, 202-297-4270; Urbanpetals.com

FLOWERS: Orange roses with salal leaves (\$6 for nine, Costco), cluster of hot pink carnations (\$4.50, Costco), three hydrangeas (snipped from yard), red cabbage (\$1.50, Giant), habanero peppers (\$1)

VESSELS: Large black soup bowl (above, \$5, World Market), two blue votive holders (left, \$3 each, World Market)

DETAILS: These neon-bright blooms will pop long beyond their 15 minutes of fame.

TIP: Keep hydrangeas fresh by pounding open woody stem tips with a hammer, von Pollaro advises.



Let the Sunflowers In

WHO: Marianne Raub of Helen Olivia, 222 N. Lee St., Alexandria, 703-548-2848; Helenolivia.com

FLOWERS: One blue hydrangea (\$6, Helen Olivia), four yellow sunflowers (\$3 each)

VESSELS: Footed tumblers (\$8 for set of six, Ikea), two votive candles (50 cents each, Ikea), brown/blue polka dot ribbon (\$1.61, Ikea), blue ribbon (\$1.25, Ikea)

DETAILS: Big, blousy blooms will be the life of the dinner party table, served in ribbon-wrapped tumblers for extra punch. Re-stack, re-arrange, rinse, repeat.

TIP: "The best part: Since these are glasses, after the party you can use them to serve drinks," Raub says.



The Mod Coupling

WHO: Michael Lanni of Volanni, 219 9th St. SE; 202-547-1603; Volanni.com

FLOWERS: Pink peonies (\$4 for small cluster, Safeway), mint, lamb's ear and geranium (clipped from yard)

VESSEL: Blue vase (from Lanni's personal collection)

DETAILS: A glossy peekaboo vase

juxtaposes earthy garden sprouts with lush blooms for a modern-yet-ethereal effect.

TIP: "Use a vase or something you have in your house, or you're going to spend all your money on containers," Lanni says. Scour local thrift shops and flea markets for unusual finds on the cheap.

Eco-Edgy

WHO: Sidra Forman Flowers, 1508 6th St. NW; 202-234-4598; Sidraforman.com

FLOWERS: White peonies (\$5 each, Dupont Circle FreshFarm Market); mint and white French lavender (clipped from yard)

VESSELS: Recycled ridged soda bottles with labels scrubbed off

DETAILS: Simple nosegays evoke old-timey charms sans the musty whiff — in fact, these smell like dessert.

TIP: "This time of year, there really is nothing better than a peony," Forman says. "They're expensive, but all you really need is one."



Less Is More

WHO: Philippa Tarrant Floral Design, 202-413-8562; Philippatarrant.com

FLOWERS: Pink peonies (\$20 for bunch, Whole Foods)

VESSELS: Two boxy vessels (from Tarrant's stash) covered with flocked damask wrapping paper (\$7, Container Store)

DETAILS: Bland vases go neo-Baroque when re clad with posh paper.

You can also dig through your recycling for an empty juice carton, gussy it up with what amounts to a slipcover and — voila! — you have an eco-friendly vase.

TIP: "You can make flowers look bigger with two containers instead of one," Tarrant says.



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Meet Me in The Middle

WHO: Dave Millsbaugh of Ultra Violet Flowers, 1218 31st St. NW; 202-333-3002; Ultravioletdc.com

FLOWERS: Magenta carnations (\$11 for three bunches, Safeway) and curly mint from his garden

VESSEL: Brown ceramic pitcher (from Millsbaugh's cupboard)

DETAILS: A nip-tuck gives tired carnations a glam prognosis.

TIP: "I pulled the centers out so they wouldn't look like carnations. I love doing that to roses, too," Millsbaugh says.

VASE STUDIES

Unlike your college roommate, who feels free to crash on your couch indefinitely, flowers always seem to cut their time in your place too short. Get more bang for your buds with tips from local petal pushers. k.x.

Petals Wide Shut: You've no doubt seen droopy blossoms fade into a death-by-supermarket fate. Pick petals that haven't yet hit their prime: "Buy flowers tight rather than blown-open for a longer shelf life," advises Stephanie Meuse Melvin of Alexandria's Wisteria.

Get Fresh: "Find someone who works in the floral department of your grocery or discount store and ask which day of the week they get their new shipments, then buy your flowers that day or the next," says Sarah von Pollaro of Urban Petals. For the best value, buy seasonally. Right now, that means hydrangeas, phlox, lilies and yarrow, says Meuse Melvin.

Go Wild: Tropical plants such as striped crotons can be an inexpensive source of colorful accents. "Cut some of the leaves off for use in your arrangement, then keep the plant in a window and watch it regrow," von Pollaro says.

Veg Out: Before farmers market fare becomes dinner, use goodies to perk up arrangements — submerged in a vase or skewered into the bouquet. "Lemons, kumquats or Japanese eggplant can turn an ordinary arrangement into a showpiece," von Pollaro says.

Redistribute the Wealth: To get the most pop from petals, gently hack apart stems overloaded with blossoms. "Mums, for example, have many blooms on one stalk," von Pollaro says. "They work better in a centerpiece when each smaller stem is separated."

Stem Cell Savvy: "The best thing you can do for your flowers is to recut stems and change the water in the vase," von Pollaro says, whether that's every day or, er, when you remember. While you're at it, trim leaves off the stems so posies get more H₂O; or, at the very least, get rid of foliage below the water line, which rots and breeds bacteria.

Faded Glory: Revive a wilting bloom with a warm bath in the sink. Cut the stem and float the flower. "Within hours, you'll have a strong flower," Meuse Melvin says.