



# Questions and Answers

## *with Jonathan Moseley*



*Hello Jonathan*

*Hello Jonathan, First of all, I thoroughly enjoyed seeing your demonstration at the RHS Malvern Show recently; fabulous designs. In a previous issue you talked about the importance of conditioning foliage too. Could you give a few more tips on this particular subject please!*

*Anne Mickelson, Tamworth.*

Hello Anne, I am delighted you enjoyed my demonstrations at RHS Malvern in May, it was a great show although I was so very busy that I hardly managed to see anything except for the amazing Grow your own wedding garden. You know, Anne, conditioning foliage and flowers is so important and Malvern is a prime example. I had to take all my plant materials down to the show with me and

they needed to last for five days in a warm humid marquee, so I spent a good five hours conditioning everything here at my studio to ensure it would look good throughout the duration of the show. In its simplest terms, conditioning refers to the pre treatment of flowers and foliage before we begin to formally arrange them. I would compare conditioning to us preparing ourselves before a glamorous night out (if we are lucky enough!), where we have a long soak in the bath and then tweak and perfect our appearance before making a grand entrance. It is just the same for our plant materials, we need to cut everything and give them a long drink in clean water, with added flower food, ideally overnight to ensure they are at their best for the arrangement. There are a host of specifics for various flowers and foliage, but you can learn and research them over time.

When I first began arranging flowers you were encouraged to condition things by placing them in boiling water, bashing the stem ends with hammers and axes and also singeing the stems over a naked flame. To be honest, I never do any of these things. The two simplest rules I would always encourage is for any woody stems, like most branches of foliage or flowers like roses, is to cut at a 45 degree angle and remove some of the lower leaves. Secondly large single leaves like *Hosta*, *Fatsia* or *Bergenia* I would soak overnight in deep water and for anything that I am cutting from the garden be it flower or foliage, I always carry a bucket with a few inches of water in the bottom and place the stems immediately into the water, to avoid an air lock forming.

The golden rule for almost any flower or foliage is to leave it to rest and drink overnight somewhere cool and dark in a bucket of water with flower food. If you get into the habit of doing that then you will always be delighted with how long your flower displays last.