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Contributed by Susie Middleton

## 'TIS HELLEBORE SEASON!



Hellebores can be planted in the spring or fall. Some species are slow to develop and may require two seasons before they bloom. Bloom time depends on both the species and your climate. The Christmas rose (*Helleborus niger*) can bloom in December in zone 7 or warmer but rarely blooms until spring in colder climates. Most species can be counted on to bloom somewhere between December and April and stay in bloom for a month or longer. Ensure the hellebore doesn't have too much nitrogen, as this will result in lovely foliage but a severe shortage of blooms. (Source: <https://www.thespruce.com/growing-hellebores-in-the-garden>)

Now that you've got them growing, here are some tips on using them in a flower arrangement, courtesy of <https://www.gardenista.com/posts/cut-flowers-tips-help-hellebores-to-last-longer-no-drooping-in-vase/>

**About the cultivar:** Right: In an immature specimen, a yellow fringe of stamens is surrounded by small, ruffled petals. The large purple "petals" are actually sepals that enclose the petals. Even after a flower finishes blooming, the sepals will stay on the stalk and continue to "bloom," which is why hellebores are prized for having a long season of color.



**When to cut the bloom:** The best bet to get hellebores to last in floral arrangements is to use ones that have their seed pods formed (at least one on each stem). The more developed the seed pod, the sturdier the hellebore will be. This is because the sepals become stiff and waxy as the seed pod develops, which helps them resist wilting. A really mature hellebore can actually hold up beautifully out of water for a day or more. They're great for boutonnieres and hair flowers!

**Can you spot the hellebores that are almost ready to harvest and the ones that aren't?**



**According to Phillipa Craddock and Hellebore Growers Gillie and Fi, there are two conditioning techniques:**

- **SEARING THE STEM** - "Once satisfied they are ready, we cut and then place the stems into just boiled water for about 15 -20 seconds to 'sear,' until the stems blacken." Then plunge the flowers into deep cool water for a few hours, after which we find they are "pretty bomb proof."
- **SCORING THE STEM** - Scoring the stem (a fine slit up the side of the whole stem) was a new concept to Gillie and Fi: "We knew many swore by the method, even on fully unripe hellebores." They conducted their own experiment - cutting a series of young flowers and gently scoring a very fine slit up the full length of each stem (from the bottom and almost up to the flower head). Each slit was about 1-2 mm deep, just into the outer coat. The stem is then plunged into deep drink in water, covering the slit fully.

Usually a flower this young would wilt within a few hours, yet supporting what many others have said, the scored stem lasted and remained robust. Once the flower had been conditioned for 24 hrs it then stood firmly in flower arrangements. "We have had tremendous results with this method - with newly flowering stems lasting brilliantly without needing to wait till they ripen."

So if you have some Hellebores in your yard, try cutting some for an arrangement. If you don't have any yet, visit your local garden center or keep an eye out for some in the spring catalogs.

Sources:

<https://www.philippacraddock.com/journal-hellebore-boosting-longevity>

<https://lovenfreshflowers.com/2019/03/27/harvest-hellebores/>

<https://www.gardenista.com/posts/cut-flowers-tips-help-hellebores-to-last-longer-no-drooping-in-vase/>

<https://www.thespruce.com/growing-hellebores-in-the-garden>